

ELEVEN WERE BRAVE

by

Francis Beeding

published by

Hodder and Stoughton

ST. PAUL'S HOUSE • LONDON EC4

FRANCIS BEEDING

THE ONE SANE MAN
THE TWO UNDERTAKERS
THE THREE FISHERS
THE FOUR ARMOURERS
THE FIVE FLAMBOYS
THE SIX PROUD WALKERS
THE SEVEN SLEEPERS
THE EIGHT CROOKED
TRENCHES
THE NINE WAXED FACES
THE TEN HOLY HORRORS
ELEVEN WERE BRAVE
THE TWELVE DISGUISES
THERE ARE THIRTEEN

THE NORWICH VICTIMS
HE COULD NOT HAVE SLIPPED
NOT A BAD SHOW
HELL LET LOOSE
THE BLACK ARROWS
THE BIG FISH
THE ERRING UNDER-
SECRETARY
NO FURY
DEATH IN FOUR LETTERS
MR. BODADIL
THE EMERALD CLASP
TAKE IT CROOKED
MURDER INTENDED

ELEVEN WERE BRAVE



Francis
Beeding

THE CHARACTERS IN THIS BOOK ARE
ENTIRELY IMAGINARY, AND HAVE NO
RELATION TO ANY LIVING PERSON

FIRST PUBLISHED . . . DECEMBER 1940
THIS EDITION . . . OCTOBER 1950

Made and Printed in Great Britain for
Hodder & Stoughton Limited London
by Wyman & Sons Limited London
Fakenham and Reading

TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL,
P.C., C.H., M.P.

PRIME MINISTER OF ENGLAND, WHO, UPON GRIEVOUS
TIDINGS, PLEDGED HIS COUNTRY TO RESTORE THE
INDEPENDENCE AND GREATNESS OF FRANCE,
THIS BOOK IS, WITH HIS CONSENT, IN
ADMIRATION DEDICATED

NOTE

It would be idle to pretend that this story bears no relation to present history. Famous names are freely mentioned and many of the events described are fresh in the public mind. The author has, moreover, given to these events a shape which, in essentials, faithfully conveys his own impression of the major incidents which attended the tragic collapse of the leaders of France following the retreat of the Allied Armies from the Meuse in May last.

For the personal adventures of Colonel Granby and John Orford in the fulfilment of their mission, however, the author's fancy must be held responsible, as also for the intimate scenes and dialogues in which composite public characters, under fictitious names, play their appointed parts. The reader is accordingly not invited to identify Vespasien Privet, Marshal Villebois, Lucien Rever, or any of that sad company with any particular person alive or dead.

FRANCIS BEEDING.

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CHAPTER I

RECONNAISSANCE

CHEERFULNESS, as the poet said, has an incurable habit of breaking in, or words to that effect. Few people, west of the Rhine, or east of it for that matter, had any special reason to be cheerful on that particular May morning of 1940. Hitler's blitzkrieg had started in earnest, and a blitzkrieg is not really amusing for more than a handful of bigwigs on the winning side. Nevertheless, I was cheerful. For one thing, I was in Paris again, and Paris had never looked so beautiful.

Then, too, I had it on the best authority that all was well with the French armies, who were, it was insisted, standing up valiantly to the full fury of the Hun in Belgium and Northern France. My information was not at third, or even at second hand. I had it from General Gamelin himself, whom I had heard to declare only the night before, dining with the Corbusiers: "I am satisfied with my patient. The fever has fallen in the last twenty-four hours."

I slipped out of bed and drew aside the heavy curtains. The sky was blue. The Rue Cambon was a-glitter with sunshine. I crossed the room and pushed open the door which communicated with that of my friend and chief, Henry Cheriton, with whom I shared a suite on the second floor of the Hôtel Cosmopolitan. It was a shame to wake Henry so soon, but it was one of my duties to get him up early for the long day's work. In peace-time the chambermaid would have performed that office, but in war-time, even in the Hôtel Cosmopolitan, which had once housed Queen Victoria for a night and never quite

recovered from that visitation, housemaids were few and far between, and I was roused every morning by a throaty gurgle from the telephone. That is one of the maddening things about French telephones: they do not give an honest-to-God ring—not in hotels, at any rate. They make a noise like someone being strangled, slowly, painfully, and not very continuously. Henry's telephone was at work, but Henry, poor fellow, was too far gone to hear it. His head, with the high-domed forehead, was lying half buried in the pillow. The lines of fatigue were strongly marked around the eyes and down to the mouth from the nostrils of his curving nose. Henry had been doing fourteen hours a day since the war began and had just spent his only long week-end of freedom in seeing his wife and children safely back to England.

He opened his eyes.

"Hallo, old chap, eight o'clock?"

He said that every morning.

"A fine day," I announced, "and all's well."

He sat up yawning.

"Propaganda before breakfast," he grunted. "But I hope you are right."

"I have it on the best authority," I said, moving towards my own room and making ready to shave.

We leave the door between our rooms open, being accustomed to talk while we are preparing to face the world.

"I was dining with the Corbusiers last night," I continued, "and General Gamelin said that he was satisfied."

Thereupon I repeated the General's *mot* concerning his patient.

"Not a bad crack," said Henry, "but did you ever hear that other one of the late lamented Aristide Briand?"

Henry had heaved himself out of bed and was filling his basin with hot water. Sounds like a machine-gun in

action testified to the relative efficiency of French plumbing. Henry's voice came through the open door:

"'War is too serious a business to be left to the soldiers.' That is what Briand said."

"But Gamelin," I objected, "is first-rate. Everyone believes in Gamelin."

"We believe in Gamelin because he is Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies," retorted Henry, "and we shall continue to believe in him as long as circumstances permit."

"Do you believe in Gamelin?" I demanded.

"That," responded Henry, "is a straight question, and I come from Whitehall. I never answer a straight question. There is, moreover, only one reason nowadays why anybody believes anything."

"Because he wants to believe it?" I suggested.

"Exactly. Therefore I believe in Gamelin."

My spirits were falling rapidly. The sunshine pouring into the rather dingy room seemed less bright.

"But it becomes increasingly difficult," continued Henry after a pause.

I put my head round the door. Henry's chin was covered with lather and he was applying the brush vigorously.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He put his head over his left shoulder. He had the air of a highly intelligent bird. That is the trouble about Henry: he is not only intelligent, but looks it—a serious handicap in a diplomatist.

"Are you aware," he asked, "that Carap's army broke twenty-four hours ago?"

I looked at him in astonishment. Something was happening to my stomach. I realised that I was not going to enjoy my breakfast.

"On the Meuse?" I stammered.

"On the Meuse," he repeated.

"Then the Boche are over the river?"

"They secured at least one bridgehead."

"Good God! But the bridges were, of course, destroyed?"

Henry did not answer for a moment, but began to remove the bristles from his chin with short jerky strokes of his safety-razor.

"They should have been destroyed last night," he said at last. "But one never knows. We shall be a little older and perhaps a little wiser when we reach the Embassy."

"Even if the French had broken completely, they would have had time to blow up the bridges?"

I had returned to my room and was speaking through the open door.

"The bridges," repeated Henry, "are probably destroyed, but not by the French. The R.A.F. had orders yesterday evening to do that little job of work."

Silence fell. Presently Henry spoke again.

"Better take first bath. Otherwise you will need your gas mask."

Henry was alluding to his nasty habit of mixing sulphur twice a week with his bath water. He believed this to be a cure for rheumatism.

I plunged into my bath hurriedly. Henry's observations had filled me with a not unreasonable gloom. He was not one of those mercurial fellows, up one minute and down the next. He had an unpleasant way of seeing things as they were, and not as he wished them to be. This made him unpopular at the Foreign Office, where he only retained his position owing to the fact that he was often right when his colleagues were wrong, but always allowed them to take the credit for it. He had won more ribbons by proxy than any other man in the service.

His present scepticism was the more disturbing as it fitted only too well with the mood in which my other and real chief had despatched me on my present errand.

My real chief—unknown to Henry—was none other than P.B.3, head of the Military Intelligence Division of the War Office. In his private life, which is intermittent, he is known, for better or worse, as Colonel Granby. I do not know how or why he put me into my present job. Possibly my being a comparatively raw recruit and therefore less notorious than his more seasoned colleagues had something to do with it. I had served as a very young officer in the last war. Since then I had drifted about—one of the lost generation. I had been a publisher, a Red Cross official, and an announcer on the B.B.C.—till Granby had recruited me for the Secret Service.

Granby, so he had explained, had wanted someone in Paris who would be able to run about, keep his ears open, and seem to be quite unconnected with Intelligence of any kind.

“And don’t show too much of it yourself,” he added.

It had been impressed upon me that not even the Embassy was to know of my connection with P.B.3.

So I had come to Paris in a dual capacity. Officially, I was British liaison with the French Ministry of Information and responsible, through Henry, for keeping that large and somewhat amorphous organisation in touch with the Embassy. Unofficially, I was dog’s body to Colonel Granby, with instructions to look and listen. More particularly, I was to let him know from time to time whether the friendly, steadfast face which France turned in public towards her British ally faithfully conveyed the sentiments of her rulers or—what was perhaps even more important—of the two hundred French families who, it was whispered, might still be thinking the Hun less dangerous than the workers of the world to themselves and their money-bags.

The popular view in London—and my own first impressions of Paris confirmed it—was that France was sound and single-hearted, with but one idea in her

lovely, determined head, which was to destroy the Boche wherever he might be found, resist him to the last soldier, fight him to the last gun, and make him rue the hour when he had violated with his dirty foot the sacred soil of Picardy. But I had since spent three days at the Ministry. I was now behind the scenes, where men allowed themselves to be cynical, let slip their misgivings in a witty phrase, or got into corners with grave faces and carried on disquieting conversations which ceased abruptly if a stranger should come within earshot of their conference.

I did not like the atmosphere of the Ministry. But this, I told myself, was only prejudice. I never had liked Ministries, anyway. What, I asked myself, would a Frenchman think of the British war effort if he based his judgment on things seen in Whitehall or if he looked for the soul of England in Malet Street?

Such were my reflections as, on that fine May morning, I entered the Ministry to which I was now accredited and made my way to my office on the fourth floor.

I shared the ramshackle lift with three Frenchmen—two in uniform, and one a civilian with the rosette of the Legion in the buttonhole of his grey suit. They were talking together in low voices, but, on seeing me, dropped to a whisper. I was getting used to this sort of thing. Possibly it meant nothing. People in Ministries always behave as though they were sharing secrets of State with which such as they can alone be trusted. I left the lift and walked down the corridor towards the staircase up which I must walk to reach my own office. I passed two groups in the corridor. In one of them I recognised the tall, burly form of Captain Hugon, the military member of the Minister's Cabinet.

"*Mais non, mais non,*" I heard him say almost fiercely, "there is no cause whatever for alarm. None whatever, I assure you."

He caught sight of me and mechanically thrust out his

hand, as Frenchmen do when they see you in the morning. I shook it in the French manner. It might have been anybody's hand.

He was talking to the head of the Belgian Section of the Ministry, a tall man with a ragged moustache. I knew him already as a twitterer. For such as he the war was lost already. Alarm and despondency were his bedfellows.

I thought it best to say nothing, but went on my way. The next group I encountered was at the stair head. Again I recognised one of its members—little Jacques Perrin, fresh from the Ecole Normal and wearing the dark blue of the French Air Service. He was Sous-Chief de Cabinet to the Secretary-General of the Ministry, a distinguished writer who spoke such perfect French that I never dared reply to him except in English. He was talking in an animated fashion, waving his hands about with the true Gallic emphasis. He caught sight of me and wrung me warmly by the hand.

"*Bravo les anglais!*" he said. "The bridges have been destroyed."

My spirits rose.

"Your Air Force—magnificent!" continued the little man.

I shrugged my shoulders in an access of national modesty, but my heart was bursting with pride.

"This brave achievement will certainly prevent the situation from developing."

It was César Abel, the Secretary-General himself, speaking. And that was how he spoke. I had not noticed him before. He was a man of middle size with sparse, sandy hair and small eyes. I murmured a few words of acknowledgment and sped on towards my office. The fog had lifted and all was well.

I entered my room to find portly Oliver Ackland awaiting me in the uniform of the R.A.F. His three huge chins were pressed down firmly on his collar. His upper

lovely, determined head, which was to destroy me no one wherever he might be found, resist him to the last soldier, fight him to the last gun, and make him rue the hour when he had violated with his dirty foot the sacred soil of Picardy. But I had since spent three days at the Ministry. I was now behind the scenes, where men allowed themselves to be cynical, let slip their misgivings in a witty phrase, or got into corners with grave faces and carried on disquieting conversations which ceased abruptly if a stranger should come within earshot of their conference.

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I entered my room to find portly Oliver Ackland awaiting me in the uniform of the R.A.F. His three huge chins were pressed down firmly on his collar. His upper

lip carried the usual smudge of snuff. Ackland was an old friend of mine, Paris Manager of Anglo-French Airways in peace-time, now mobilised as an interpreter to the R.A.F., for he was well past fifty. There were few people in Paris whom he did not know, and fewer still whom he wholly trusted. But he was full of charity and called all men brother.

"Brother John," he began, "is it true that the bridges have gone west?"

"So I hear."

"Damned good show."

"You will doubtless hear about it when you go to the Press Conference," I continued.

He nodded.

"Going now, brother John," he said. "They have altered the time again, and the good Colonel waits for no man."

He hurried from the room. It was one of his duties to attend the daily Press Conference, held at the War Ministry, Rue St. Dominique.

I settled down to my correspondence. It was routine stuff, dealing mostly with radio propaganda, a legacy from my predecessor, who had departed with his wife for the Pyrenees, suffering, it was said, from a nervous breakdown. This had caused him to lose, mislay, destroy, sell, or make off with all his records, which made the answering of letters none too simple. He had, however, left behind him his French secretary, whose memory was prodigious.

Before starting to dictate, I got through to Henry on the private line to the Embassy and told him what I had heard in the corridor. It was a private line and we could talk freely on it. His reception of my news was not enthusiastic.

"Yes," he said. "They have destroyed the bridges. But only one of our machines got back."

"But the bridges are destroyed?"

"Yes."

"So the Germans who crossed the Meuse are isolated?"

"I suppose so."

"And the French counter-attack is for to-day, I imagine."

"Perhaps."

"You don't seem too happy about it, Henry?"

"I just don't know. Let me have the report of the Press Conference as soon as you can."

"Of course."

I hung up. The bridges had been destroyed. But Henry was not rejoicing.

I settled down again to my correspondence and discovered that I had not yet received some records of English folk-songs which Radio Paris was anxious to broadcast on the following day. There was no time to write to London, so I picked up the telephone which gave me a direct line to the Ministry of Information in Bloomsbury. I twirled the handle. Nothing happened. I tried several times. I blew into the mouth-piece. But the instrument was dumb. I put it down and, as I did so, the house telephone rang. One of the British censors attached to the French censorship department told me that he was having trouble with the English journalists. They were all submitting messages for transmission to London, but there were no lines. They had all been cut.

"I know that," I responded. "I tried to get through myself a moment ago."

"We've been on to the P.T.T.," continued the censor. "I will let you know as soon as we get through."

For half an hour I was left to my correspondence. A messenger then announced that a certain Mr. Clarke wished to see me, and presently there entered a little man in a blue suit. He sported a walrus moustache. He wore tinted spectacles and carried a shapeless felt hat in his hand. His manner towards my secretary was

ingratiating in the extreme. He spoke French with a strong British accent.

"What can I do for you?" I asked.

"It is most kind of you to receive me," he said to me in English with a slight Cockney twang. "I know what a busy man you must be."

My secretary glided from the room.

"What can I do for you?" I repeated a little absently.

The man was not too prepossessing. I judged him to be an English commercial traveller. Presumably he was in difficulties and in need of Embassy help, in which case he would be referred gently but firmly to the Consulate.

But then I had a shock. The little man threw his hat on the table. He had shambled diffidently into the room, but now he stood erect with his shoulders squared. He whipped off his spectacles and with his head slightly to one side stared at me from his deep-set and piercing blue eyes.

"Can you get me a line to London, John?" he asked.

"Granby?" I gasped.

"So why sit there looking as if I were Granby's ghost?"

"You startled me," I explained. "It's your appearance, appearing as you do."

He smiled.

"Sorry, John, but I'm too well known in Paris to be seen hopping like Cleopatra in the common streets."

I looked at him a moment in silence. It was never any good asking Granby questions. But why had he come suddenly to Paris? Why was it necessary for him to conceal the fact? What tide in the affairs of men had washed him up into my office three days after he had bidden me farewell in the flat, that is not a flat, in Battersea? Perhaps he would tell me something. More likely not.

"So you want a line to London?" I said.

Granby nodded.

"Normal communications are cut," he explained.

"I'll see if I can fix things," I responded.

"That is what I want you to do," returned Granby.

"When did you arrive?"

"Early this morning."

"Can you lunch with me?"

He shook his head.

"No time for that."

"You sound tired," I said. "What about a drink?"

"Always time for a drink," he responded.

Soon we were walking down the blue-carpeted stairs of the hotel and into the street. He led me to a little *bistro* on the corner of the Rue Cambon and Mont Thabor. It has an English name, the King Charles, and there is a picture of the merry monarch above the door. Inside it is a bar where champagne can be had at all hours. We had some. It sharpened my curiosity. What was Granby doing here in Paris? I broke the habit of years and started to question him.

"Just a routine visit?" I ventured.

"You can call it that if you like," answered Granby.

"I see. Not a routine visit."

"It is and it isn't."

He glanced round the *bistro*. It was empty except for the woman who kept it, and she was behind the bar at the far end.

"Keep your eyes and ears well open during the next few days," he said. "Things are not too good."

"You said all that in London," I reminded him.

"What is the new trouble? The tidings this morning are not so bad. I hear that the bridges were blown up last night."

"The bridges were blown up two nights ago."

"Then why was I told only this morning?"

"The French High Command ordered us to keep it dark—even from the Embassy."

I sipped my wine and stared at him in amazement.

"It was realised," Granby continued, "that, as soon as people knew that the bridges were down, they would begin to ask about this counter-attack we've heard so much about."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that it failed?"

"No."

"Then what is the trouble?"

"There was no counter-attack."

"No counter-attack?"

"There was no counter-attack," he repeated.

This conversation was beginning to shape like an encounter between two back-chat comedians.

"Why was there no counter-attack?" I continued.

"That is just what I want to know," he answered.

"Why not ask the Generals?"

"The Generals have told me already what they think I ought to know. They are talking, rather late in the day, about open warfare. Others talk, still later in the day, about defence in depth. You know the sort of stuff."

"And you don't believe it?"

Granby shrugged.

"I don't know what to believe," he said.

I reflected a moment.

"You're not, by any chance, hinting at political interference with the Army?" I ventured.

Again he shrugged.

"Maybe," he answered. "I don't know. Things are not too good. I have said that before. I shall probably say it again. It's not yet, however, the official view. It is my own private and particular hunch, and nobody cares it in London. There the big people still believe that they wish to believe. Sacred union holds the field. The Anglo-French alliance is indestructible. Anglo-French co-operation is entire. Clementin is Clemenceau in modern dress. The French Army, which was to have

fought on the Meuse, will fight on the Aisne, on the Marne, in Paris, on the Loire, if necessary in Timbuctoo. That is what they believe in London. That is what I should like to believe myself. But in our profession if we always believed what we wanted to believe, few of us would live to tell the tale."

"Surely our Prime Minister——" I began.

"I have not seen the Prime Minister for some days," answered Granby.

There was a short silence.

"Well," I said at last, "what do you want me to do?"

"Keep all this under your hat, laddie. Listen to everybody. Believe nobody. Try to look as innocent as God made you. In the words of Polonius: 'Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.'"

He paused.

"I think that's all," he concluded. "So here's to Auntie!"

He finished his drink at a gulp and rose to his feet.

"By the way," he added as we quitted the *bistro*, "when you next see your minister, ask him to introduce you to Madame Bertrand."

I gasped.

"The famous Madame Bertrand?"

He nodded.

"You would like me to meet her?"

He nodded again, looking at me as a man looks at a horse on which he has decided to put his shirt.

"You are tall and fair," he said. "You carry yourself well. You are still in the prime of life. And I hope she takes a fancy to you."

CHAPTER II

FRENCH MINNIE

ON returning to the Ministry, I found that Henry had been ringing me up. I spoke to him on the private line and he told me to seek an immediate audience with Frisson, the French Minister of Information, to whom I was accredited as liaison officer.

"Tell him," said Henry, "that in a few days the British Government will be passing the most revolutionary piece of legislation that is ever likely to appear on the Statute Book."

This was the first I had heard of the new Emergency Powers Act.

"Tell him," continued Henry, "that it is the equivalent of the *levée en masse*. It may cheer him up—or perhaps it won't."

I put down the receiver and, by way of the *standard du ministre*, the private telephone which is attached to the cabinet of every French minister I called up Frisson's private secretary and secured an interview.

Down the broad, shallow stairs I tripped—tripped is the right expression, for my heart was light. Surely this news would show the French Government that their English friends meant business?

There were still groups of officials standing about, but I paid them no heed. They were not really so very remarkable after all. Officials in French Ministries are always standing about. They like to be seen at the right moment with the right people.

I reached the first floor and entered the room of Madame Breguet, personal private secretary of the minister. She was dressed in black, with a dead-white face.

"In two minutes, Monsieur Orford," she said, and in two minutes I found myself shaking hands with the minister across his wide, ornate desk in what had once been the drawing-room of the principal suite of the Hôtel Europe. Frisson was taller even than I and wore spectacles, above which rose a domed forehead. He was bald, except for a thick fringe of dark hair over the ears. His face, in the strong May-day sunshine, was pallid. A cigarette adhered to his full lower lip, and in front of him was an ash-tray, full of squashed stubs.

I delivered my message and expounded its import. I grew eloquent, or as eloquent as my French would allow. While I was speaking, I watched the dull eyes behind the spectacles. They did not change or lighten and, when I had finished, he made no comment, but merely inquired whether my information should be given to the Press. I told him that, for the moment, it was for his own private ear and that I would tell him when it could be released.

"That is good news," he said after a pause, but his tone was flat. He might have been thanking me for a box of cigars instead of an announcement that the British people were going to be asked to put their properties, liberties, and lives unreservedly at the disposal of King George for the prosecution of the war.

"It is certainly good news," he repeated. "It is, as you say, the *levée en masse*. It means that at last you mobilise."

"We have a saying," I responded, "better late than never."

"And you also have a saying that the English lose every battle but the last. Which is not perhaps so comforting."

I did not think it wise to be offended. Nor perhaps did he mean to offend.

"Have you any news for me?" I asked after a short,

uneasy silence. "Anything which I can pass on to my Ambassador?"

He shook his head.

"There is no news," he said. "Not yet, at any rate. This is now a war of movement. We must hope for the best."

Again there was silence. I was casting about in my mind for some way of raising the subject of Madame Bertrand. Evidently he was anxious to end the interview. I was about to ask him bluntly for an introduction, when he gave me an opportunity.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he inquired.

It was the common ministerial formula, but even this effort at geniality seemed to give him pain.

"Thank you, Monsieur le Ministre," I responded instantly. "I have made many contacts during the last few days with the heads of your departments, and they have all treated me with the greatest consideration and kindness. I hope I shall be able to do useful work."

The minister was on his feet and had put out his hand.

"Monsieur le Ministre," I added, "would it be possible for me perhaps to meet Madame Bertrand? I am anxious, if possible, to be received in her house, where, I am told, I shall meet a great many people whom I should know if I am to be really useful."

His hand touched mine. There was no strength in his grasp.

"I am afraid that I cannot help you there," he said tonelessly. "I am not well enough acquainted with Madame Bertrand."

I murmured something conventional and returned to my office.

Towards one o'clock Granby rang me up. He could not lunch with me, he said, but I was to meet him at three o'clock on Weber's terrace in the Rue Royale. I told him over the wire of the result of my request to Frisson.

"So he is not well enough acquainted with Madame Bertrand?" repeated Granby. "I am surprised to hear that. Or, perhaps, I am not surprised."

I lunched with a party of British journalists, correspondents of some of the London newspapers. There were half a dozen of them and very pleasant company. There is, in fact, little better company in the world than a posse of journalists on the job. Their talk is vivid. Their minds are alert and keen. Their stories are good, though rarely for publication. To a man who has to spend much of his time with Government officials they come like fresh air and sunlight into a stuffy house. They give respect where it is due, but their irreverence in face of imposture or complacency is irresistible. Not the least refreshing of their qualities is their zeal for evidence and their readiness to face it.

It was part of my job to be on good terms with them, and I found it easy, in spite of the fact that as a public relations officer I was never able to tell them anything they didn't already know and was frequently obliged to make a mystery of events and situations on which they were infinitely more well informed than I was.

There were, I remember, Redsdale of the *Clarion*, Girdle of the *Manchester Gazette*, Jonathan Blye of the *Daily Wire*, and three or four others. I brought Madame Bertrand into the conversation. Of course they knew all, possibly more than all, about her.

"The most tiresome, dangerous, and amusing woman in Paris," said Blye. "She knows how to love wisely for profit and well for pleasure. Still active and quite insatiable, so they say, though she will not see fifty again. What do you want with Madame Bertrand?"

"Nothing particular," I said. "But she seems the sort of person I ought to know."

"That's easy," he rejoined. "She is throwing a party to-night. I will take you along. I have known her for years. Not that it's done me any good. Or

any harm. I'm not rich enough to excite her avarice or handsome enough to excite her——"

"Censorship, please," said somebody.

"—interest," concluded Blye.

"You shall meet her," he continued, turning back to me. "She lives in a huge house at Neuilly. Circe of the silver sty. She is rolling in money, and you can get all you want to eat and drink. But watch your step, old man. Remember what happened to the companions of Odysseus."

"Come and dine with me beforehand," I suggested. Blye shook his head.

"Nobody dines before lining up at Madame Bertrand's buffet. But I'll call for you at half-past nine at the King Charles."

The conversation turned to the interruption of telephone communications with London. My journalist friends were divided between exasperation at being unable to keep in touch with their papers and modified delight that they would therefore be free to give their time and attention that evening to Madame Bertrand.

I left them at half-past two and walked back alone over the Pont du Carrousel—for we had been lunching at Michaud's in the Rue Jacob—to keep my appointment with Granby. You may wonder perhaps why I record all these small details, but I find myself clinging desperately to these last insignificant memories of Paris as she lived and moved under the shadow of war, but still herself. I find myself reluctant to turn from those last quiet hours before the storm, and I want to paint as adequate a picture as possible of the life I was living and of the atmosphere which prevailed during the days which immediately preceded the tragic collapse of France.

I remember thinking as I walked along in the hot sunshine, about all the people I had met in the last week. The journalists I had just lunched with were infinitely

the most agreeable, as they were the most efficient. I envied them their knowledge of Paris and of the French, so much more comprehensive than my own, which was nevertheless not small, their habit of taking life as it came, their zest and grip on circumstance, and I contrasted them in my mind with the officials of the Ministry, who swarmed uneasily in the huge, untidy converted hotel where I was working. There were a couple of thousand of them, perhaps, if you counted the messengers and typists and the *gardes mobiles* at the doors. What did they really think about things? What was going on in their minds? They were a cross-section of France, from the minister himself, who had been a journalist most of his life, moving between the Centre and the Left, through the Secretary-General, a distinguished man of letters, through the heads of departments, professors for the most part, and the Government officials—*ronds de cuir*, as the public contemptuously called them—down to the smaller fry, the secretaries and the secretaries of secretaries, all of whom hustled about and talked on the telephones or among themselves and seemed, as far as I could see, never able to complete one small task before taking up the next. What was the sum total of their output? What did they actually do? What was their real object? Presumably to win the war. Were they as inefficient as they seemed to be? I realised that our own Government offices in London would scarcely make a better impression on a foreign intruder, but this was cold comfort. My mind switched to Germany. Were the ministries in Berlin run like the one to which I had been accredited? I felt somehow that things would be different there. Yet, I told myself, as I looked out on the Paris Louvre, that this was a foolish, defeatist thought. The Germans had been efficient enough in the last war, but they had not won it. Efficiency counted for much, but it was not everything, and perhaps our muddled, slapdash way of doing things in London

or the apparently inconsequent manner of coping with life in Paris was, after all, the right way. It did not do to be hypnotised by the bogey of German efficiency, and yet . . . and yet, the Germans had broken through on the Meuse.

I walked through the gardens of the Tuileries. No flowers had been planted in the beds and the lawns were uncut. There was only one old gardener that I could see at work. Here and there some forgotten roses were beginning to bloom and one fountain still played audaciously.

I arrived five minutes behind time at Weber's.

"You're late," said Granby, "and I'm taking you to see Réhmy in a quarter of an hour."

I had, of course, heard much of General Réhmy, but I had never met him. He was Granby's opposite number in Paris, and I knew him to be a man in whom Granby utterly believed.

"So Frisson gave you to understand that Madame Bertrand was almost a stranger," continued Granby, as we ran in a taxi towards the little street behind the Quai d'Orsay where General Réhmy had his office.

"He did."

"Very odd," said Granby. "Madame Bertrand does not usually lose touch with her old admirers."

He was silent for a moment. Then he said suddenly:

"You are not to be amused by General Réhmy."

I stared at him in amazement.

"Why should I be amused?"

"The General speaks English like an eighteenth-century gentleman. But every now and then he descends to the vernacular. So when you hear the words, 'as you say in England,' or 'you English have a proverb,' nod your head wisely and look impressed."

I promised Granby not to be amused. Then I told him of the party at Neuilly and of my arrangement to attend it with the journalists.

Ten minutes later we found ourselves in the General's office. It was bare and not too clean. He sat behind a pitch-pine desk. A couple of filing cabinets were all his furniture, except for the two chairs on which we were sitting and a table with more chairs round it between the two windows.

Réhmy greeted Granby with a kind of tired affection, which I find hard to describe. He gave me a shrewd glance when I was introduced.

I looked at him with interest. This was not only the head of the famous *Deuxième Bureau*, but a man who had shared with Granby some of his most perilous adventures. He was tall and stooped somewhat. He had a thin and kindly face, with the eyes and habit of one who pondered his decisions and the downcast, stooping manner of the over-burdened official, as though the severity of his training had held his more human qualities in abeyance. Yet there was something about him which showed that the man, though suppressed, was very much alive. There was humour in his smile, sincerity in his gestures, a look in his eyes which declared an almost fanatical honesty of purpose.

"Frisson," began Granby abruptly, "has assured my friend that he knows little or nothing of Madame Bertrand."

"That is impossible," replied Réhmy, with a smile. "Six or seven years ago he was her lover, and he is still useful to her in other ways."

"Leaving that aside for the moment," continued Granby, "let me explain what Mr. Orford is supposed to be doing here in Paris."

In a few words he told Réhmy of my position at the Ministry and of my less official responsibilities towards himself. Réhmy, while Granby was speaking, did not look more than once or twice in my direction, but I felt, before Granby had finished, that he had me filed for reference down to the smallest detail. Those speculative

but strangely limpid eyes could see as much in a single swift glance as a flashlight camera. Nor would they ever be at a loss to interpret correctly what they saw.

"You have come to Paris at a critical moment," he said, when Granby had completed his tale.

He was looking me now full in the face, not, as it seemed, because he wanted to see into my mind, but because he wanted to secure my attention.

"I am going, as you say in England, to spill the apples," he continued, "though for a Frenchman, at this moment, that is not an easy thing to do. Do not misunderstand me. I believe in my country. France is sound to the core. Her people are magnificent. But they are puzzled and divided. Many have been deprived of their trusted leaders, who are under arrest or in hiding. Others have leaders in whom their trust is misplaced. The enemy's propaganda is ceaseless and it is infamously ingenious. He knows that he is talking to a people that hates war and that many of our politicians and men of affairs would rather see the swastika in Strasbourg or Lille than a red revolution in Paris. Things are far from well. There is defeatism in many quarters and, if the news from the front gets any worse, there are people in or near the Government who may use it for their own ends. That is why my friend Colonel Granby wants someone here to watch the situation. I warned him a week ago of certain possibilities. There are no secrets between us. In particular, I thought he should know that there are men behind the scenes here in France who dislike the English alliance. They would win the war, if they could, for France. But they would regret to see it won for England."

He paused.

"I am sorry to hear this," I ventured to say. "I would not, of course, contradict you, but where is the evidence?"

Réhmy smiled sadly.

"You cannot put your finger on currents such as these," he said, "as you can upon a drawing-pin. Take *this feeling, which we describe as defeatism*. It is vague, therefore dangerous. It spreads far and wide. If it were concentrated, we could cope with it."

"It must be centred somewhere."

"There are many centres," he answered, with a slight lift of his shoulders. "I am watching them all, but I can see nothing on which to act. As you say in England, you cannot pull the plum out of this pie with one hand."

"Madame Bertrand is one of your centres."

"Most assuredly. That explains why Frisson disclaims her acquaintance. Madame Bertrand and her circle are notorious. They correspond with your British Link. Frisson would not like it to be known that he was at all closely associated with such people."

"But surely a moment's reflection would have warned him that I could easily find that out for myself."

Once more Réhmy slightly lifted his shoulders.

"No doubt. But did you give him time for a moment's reflection? He probably said the first thing that came into his head."

"Not a very subtle man, in that case," I ventured.

Réhmy shook his head.

"You are wrong there, Mr. Orford. But even a subtle man may make a mistake when he is not on guard. Did you put your question about Madame Bertrand abruptly, or did you lead up to it?"

"I am afraid I rather sprang it on him."

"As you say in England, you caught him bending down."

There was a short silence. Réhmy's eyes were fixed solemnly upon a map on the wall. It showed Belgium and Northern France and was scored with blue pencil from the Yser to the Meuse.

"But what does it all mean?" I protested. "And what am I supposed to do next?"

"Nothing definite can be done unless or until we have proof of conspiracy or treason. It would be useless my going to the Prime Minister with an empty portfolio and telling him that I distrust Frisson, Privet, Rever, Chapeau, and the rest of them. The Prime Minister himself has no real confidence in these men, but without proof he is powerless to act. He has no party behind him. He has only his personal prestige, and must be able to show good reason for every step he takes."

—Granby had sat back during the foregoing conversation, allowing me to get acquainted with General Réhmy in my own fashion. He now rose from his chair.

"In fact, my dear Etienne," he said, "you are not disposed to play the part of Artemidorus on the Ides of March. 'Cæsar, beware of Brutus; take heed of Cassius; come not near Casca; have an eye to Cinna; trust not Trebonius; mark well Metellus Cimber; Decius Brutus loves thee not; thou hast wronged Caius Ligarius. There is but one mind in all these men, and it is bent against Cæsar. If thou beest not immortal, look about you; security gives way to conspiracy. The mighty gods defend thee.'"

Réhmy waited patiently till his friend had finished.

Then he said: "It should not be difficult for Mr. Orford to obtain an introduction to Madame Bertrand."

"That is arranged," said Granby, and he told Réhmy of my intention to attend the party at Neuilly.

Réhmy turned to me.

"Go carefully, young man," he said. "Present yourself as a disappointed man, still young enough to hope for better things. She knows the type. So does Herr Hitler. He looks for his Quislings among the men who feel that their remarkable qualities have been unfairly neglected. Report anything you hear to Colonel Granby or directly to me."

The telephone was buzzing as General Réhmy concluded. He lifted the receiver and listened a moment. Then he turned to us.

"General Gamelin," he said, "has been removed. General Weygand is now in command of the Allied Armies. We change the horses, as you say in England, in the middle of the river."

On reaching the Ministry a quarter of an hour later, I found a short note from Frisson. It informed me, in terms exceedingly polite, that he had been able to get in touch with Madame Bertrand and that she would be delighted to see me that evening at the reception.

A card of invitation from Madame Bertrand herself was attached to the note.

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And would he denounce or smile patiently at the familiar course which events were taking? The Boche, as in 1914, was carrying all before him. Reputations were falling in the same headlong fashion. Gamelin, whose genius had been carefully nursed on both sides of the Channel, had suddenly been cast down. Weygand was now to be the saviour of France, but Weygand was over seventy. Was this old soldier to fight and win a second battle of the Marne?

I had last seen Gamelin prancing down the steps of No. 10 Downing Street. It was incredible that he should have gone so quickly. Presumably he was to be a scapegoat for all the military bigwigs who had talked so confidently of the superiority of defence in modern warfare—not to mention the politicians who had spent the last six months thanking God for the Maginot Line, which now seemed to be taking its place as a derelict antiquity beside Hadrian's Wall and the Great Wall of China.

I did my best to throw off these sombre thoughts as I ran down the Avenue de Neuilly and began to look for the Rue Windsor, where Madame Bertrand's house was situated.

I discovered it eventually running parallel with the Boulevard de la Seine and, presently, I pulled up outside a large white stucco villa, built, I should imagine, when Louis Philippe was trying, with the help of an umbrella and a conscientious lack of pomp and circumstance, to persuade a sceptical nation that he was the citizen-king of their dreams.

A moment later, conducted by an elderly butler wearing white gloves, and two limping footmen, I emerged upon the terrace of the garden where Madame Bertrand was receiving her guests. These were numerous. They filled the drawing-room and overflowed into the garden, which was large and heavy with the scent of roses. In peace-time, it would, I suppose, have been artificially

CHAPTER III

FATAL WOMAN

I did not tell Henry Cheriton that I was going to the party. He knew nothing of my association with Granby. He was an old and trusted friend—but Granby and his service fight shy of official circles. We work alone and, if any one of us should get into a tight corner and fail to emerge successfully, that's just too bad. He secures no kind of official help or recognition. It is all part of the game.

Henry was dining with the Ambassador that night and didn't inquire what I was doing. So I ate alone at Viel's, and then, still in my day clothes in accordance with the terms of the invitation, started for Neuilly in the Citroën saloon which I had got back two days before from Oliver Ackland, to whom I had lent it at the outbreak of war. In the days between Munich and Armageddon I had kept a car in France registered in his name.

The Champs Elysées was in semi-darkness. In front of me loomed Napoleon's great arch and, beneath it, the flickering flame which marked the resting-place of France's unknown soldier.

What would he say, I wondered, as I passed slowly into the Avenue de la Grande Armée, 'if from the shadows he could speak?' Would he reproach us for the vanity of his sacrifice—that we should once again, after barely twenty years of uneasy peace, be fighting the same enemy he had lost his life to defeat once and for all? Or would he just shrug his shoulders in the Gallic way and take fighting the Boche every generation as a matter of course?

mobilised at the outbreak of war. We had, you see, no illusions. Now England, too, is waking up."

"Do not be too hard on us," I said. "I understand that we gave General Gamelin all and even more than he asked for in the way of men. Then, too, we have a Navy. And with every day that passes our armies grow. We are, as you know, with France to the last man and the last penny. No more England, no more France, but two nations in one, facing life together."

She looked at me in a way that might assuredly have stirred an older and wiser man. She was obviously that most dangerous of fake charms—the woman who could always feel the part she was playing. Her cue now was to be amused, but a little moved by my sincerity. All this was in her mocking, tender, conspicuous eye as she replied:

"You are serious, Monsieur. But, then, how right you are! What admirable sentiments!"

"Admirable indeed!" came another voice on my left.

I turned and saw a man of about my own height. He had large, brilliant eyes. His dark hair was thin, his complexion olive brown. He was wearing a short, black coat and striped trousers.

"My dear Monsieur Privet," said Madame Bertrand, "how charming of you to come, when you are so busy! Let me present Mr. Oxford—Monsieur Privet, of whom you may have heard. He owns most of the newspapers in Paris."

I had indeed heard of Monsieur Privet, Verpasion Privet, to give him his full name. He was roughly the French equivalent of Hearst in America and Rothermere in England. His Paris papers, *Capital Midi* and *Capital Soir*, had the largest circulation of any newspapers in France. His weekly periodical and his bi-weekly provincial magazine *Verité* were to be found on every bookstall in France. I had imagined him to be large, overbearing, fat with prosperity, but this man was slim,

illuminated for the occasion, but now it was lit only by fitful moonbeams and pricked with the glowing ends of cigarettes smoked by the company.

I bowed and kissed the hand of a woman, a head shorter than myself, wearing a simple dress of dark-blue silk which showed off her blue-white hair. Skilfully Madame Bertrand admitted her age, and it was therefore not counted against her. Nor had she any great need to fear the admission. The dark eyes were still bright and vivid, the chin firm, the lips as full and smooth as those of a young girl. I remembered Blye's description: *Still active and quite insatiable, so they say, though she will not see fifty again.* A superb row of pearls round her neck and a diamond over her wedding-ring were all the jewellery she wore. I murmured some conventional phrase, thanking her for the kindness she had shown in inviting me. I expected nothing more than a formal reply, but, as I made to pass on to join the other guests, she detained me with a smile, showing perfect teeth which were certainly Nature's own.

"On the contrary," she said, "it is I, Monsieur, who should thank you for coming. For you bring us splendid and most encouraging news."

I did not for the moment realise what she was talking about. She saw that I was puzzled.

"This new Act of Parliament in England, this *levée en masse*," she explained.

"I am glad that you think the news is encouraging, Madam," I said. "But I did not know that it was public yet."

She smiled softly.

"Otherwise it would not be interesting," she said.

Mentally I made a note of the fact that Frisson had evidently passed on to her—or to one of her friends—something which I had told him in confidence.

She added with a lively malice:

"At last you follow our example. All France was

mobilised at the outbreak of war. We had, you see, no illusions. Now England, too, is waking up."

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wiry, and ascetic. He looked like one of his own reporters, ready to jump to attention at any moment.

I slipped away in search of a drink and ran, not unexpectedly, into Jonathan Blye. I owed him an apology, for I had forgotten all about meeting him at the King Charles. I explained how it was that I had come to the party by invitation.

He took me by the arm and led me to the dining-room. Here there was a long table spread with a white cloth, behind which stood servants with bottles of champagne. We drank and he began to tell me who was who, pointing out the figures moving past. Half the French Cabinet seemed to be there, together with a large number of business men, three belonging to the famous *comité des Forges*.

"There seems a lot of high finance about," I said after a time.

"Stinks," said Blye, wrinkling his nose.

"They all seem to be happy," I observed.

"Why not?" demanded Blye. "They have had little cause to complain of the war so far. Clementin, it is true, is hoping to make them pay for it. But I doubt whether he will succeed, and I wouldn't give much for his chances of survival if he really threatened seriously to disturb their way of life."

We finished our champagne and wandered into the garden, which was very spacious and beautiful. There were some clipped yew trees and great elms and chestnuts. Presently Blye was joined by one or two of his friends and I was left alone. I had a vague idea of looking for Frisson, who would presumably be at the party. I could not hope to find him, however, in the semi-darkness and I decided to return to the house. My first achievement was to flush a pair of lovers on a stone bench, behind a thicket of box. The man was in uniform and they were in a passionate embrace. I slipped away, wishing them in my heart all the luck

in the world, and, in order not to disturb their illusion of privacy, I left the gravel path and took to the grass behind a tall, thick hedge. Presently, ahead of me, I heard a voice which I recognised. It came from Madame Bertrand.

"My dear Vespasien," she was saying, "are you sure this is the moment? You are very impulsive."

My first instinct was to get away. But that was not how a secret agent should behave, even though he did happen to be a guest of the woman speaking within earshot. Good manners are at a discount in Granby's service. All that matters is results. So I set my teeth and stayed where I was.

"I tell you," Privet was saying, "we cannot wait much longer. You must know that as well as I do."

"I know what is in the newspapers," rejoined Madame Bertrand.

I heard Privet chuckle in the darkness.

"*Sans blague*, as the immortal Grock would say. You know as much as any cabinet minister, especially now, when Clementin is running the circus."

I pricked up my ears. All my scruples had vanished. I wanted to hear everything these two people had to say. Unfortunately, however, Privet did not mean to be heard by anyone but Madame Bertrand. His voice sank to a low murmur. I could catch only just enough to infer that he was explaining just why it was impossible to wait.

I edged nearer to the speaker till I was standing perhaps six feet away from the two iron garden chairs on which they were sitting.

"So that's how it is," he concluded. "And now you know as much as I do."

"It is certainly bad," responded Madame Bertrand, "but not yet hopeless. There are still the English. What will they do?"

"Fight like hell until they are ordered to withdraw.

And Woodstock is coming over to Paris to-morrow. He wants to make quite sure that England will be able to fight this war to the last Frenchman. And he has Clementin in his pocket. So we must do something and quickly, too. We've put the old man into the Cabinet. Now we must be ready to use him."

Privet's voice was low and urgent.

"That ought not to be difficult."

"He is not convinced?"

"Not wholly."

"In that case, my dear Vespasien, he will have to be squared."

Privet laughed.

"One does not square a Marshal of France," he protested. "The old man will do what we want, if he is handled in the right way, but he will only act from the highest motives. However, don't let that discourage you. We have been working hard at him for months past and we have not done so badly. What about the Spanish gold? And the commercial treaty?"

Madame Bertrand sighed.

"It won't be plain sailing by any means," she said. "Clementin follows Woodstock and I'm beginning to think that Woodstock believes what he says. One can still, it seems, be a Prime Minister in England and do that. He has declared that this is a people's war. In that case the sooner we end it the better. No good can come to us, Vespasien, from a people's war."

There was silence for a moment between them. Then Madame Bertrand rose abruptly from her chair. I could see her shadow, and the perfume she used was loose on the air.

"And yet," she breathed suddenly on a different note, "if only it could be victory—victory for France."

"An idle dream, Maryse, and you know it."

"It will not be easy to persuade Clementin to surrender. I have heard him say that, if the armies are

defeated in France, the French Government must continue the fight in Africa or the West Indies."

"Clementin must see reason or be broken."

"Then I must persuade him to see reason. And you, of course, must have Frisson's place. That is a key position, for there you will control the censorship."

"Let us dine together the day after to-morrow. Not here. At the usual place."

"Agreed."

There was a short silence and then Madame Bertrand spoke again.

"Could you, do you think, get the old man to dine with us?"

"I could try."

"Then do your best. I might be able to influence him."

"Be careful, Maryse. I've seen you at work. Your sort of influence, forgive me, will be wasted on the veteran of France. He sleeps with his baton and a book of the hours under his pillow."

Madame Bertrand moved impatiently.

"I'm not a fool, Vespasien."

She began to move away towards the house. I stood still, leaning against the trunk of the chestnut. My mind was in a whirl, but from the general confusion certain facts stood out with horrifying precision. This woman and her satellite believed that the defeat of France was a foregone conclusion. For them the heroic defence of the French armies was a mere façade. Contrasted with this disaster, which they had discussed with an incredible levity and cynicism, they were plotting against the accepted leader of France. For what purpose? Privet intended to have Frisson's place. But what was his ultimate object? Were these people merely playing quite incorrigibly the old party game, careless of what would come of it? Or had they a fixed and considered plan of action?

At least I could warn Frisson. Or was even that possible? Could I go to a French cabinet minister and warn him solemnly that a French newspaper proprietor was intriguing to replace him? How would such a message from an Englishman be received?

More serious and infinitely more perplexing had been Privet's references to Clementin. Clementin, it seemed, must be persuaded to see reason or be broken—so they had said. To see reason meant, presumably, to admit the defeat of France, to meet it half-way, to take precautions against the evil day, to cut loose from the English alliance and to parley with the Hun.

Finally, who was the *deus ex machina* who had been put into the Cabinet—the old man, Marshal of France, who slept with a baton under his pillow? There had been a reference to Spanish gold. The allusion obviously was to Marshal Villebois, recently accredited to the Government of Spain. This venerable, heroic figure was somehow to be used as a screen for iniquities as yet unplumbed.

My obvious course was to go at once to General Réhmy. He could at least have Privet or Madame Bertrand put under observation. I should myself have like to be present at the meeting. But obviously the most sensible thing was to get Réhmy to put a trained man on the job.

I glanced at my watch. It was past eleven. Réhmy would either be at his office or at his home, for all cafés, restaurants, and other public places were already closed for the night.

I walked across the lawn and up the steps of the terrace in search of Madame Bertrand. I found her surrounded by half a dozen men, among whom I recognised Jacques Cliché, the dramatist, whose brilliant dialogue belied his name, and two or three officials of the Ministry. Inevitably they were discussing the situation.

"The gap will, of course, be closed," I heard one of them say. "Weygand has a plan. It is all worked out to the last detail."

The man spoke with an air of simple conviction. Was it genuine? I was beginning to doubt anybody who wore a black coat.

Cliché, taking up the theme, started to expatiate on the tenacity of General Weygand, his astonishing vigour and serenity of mind.

I paused in my advance towards them, for I did not wish to break up the group.

"Yes, Monsieur Cliché," agreed Madame Bertrand. "What you say is true. Weygand as Generalissimo and Clementin as Prime Minister. The combination is irresistible."

The woman spoke in a low tone, her voice almost breaking with the intensity of her conviction. This was obviously an actress. She could play any part to perfection.

She half turned as she spoke and caught sight of me. I stepped forward.

"Madame Bertrand," I began, "I must thank you for inviting me to this delightful party."

"But you are not going?"

"It is late and I have still work to do."

She put a hand lightly for a moment upon my arm.

"Nonsense," she protested. "We cannot let you go so soon. You have hardly met anybody yet, and it is part of your work, is it not, to meet people?"

"That is true," I murmured.

"Then come with me."

She led me from one group to another. I must have been presented to at least twenty notables in as many minutes. I will spare you the catalogue. They were men whose articles were read by thousands of Frenchmen, whose plays had an international reputation, whose books were known throughout the civilised world, whose

speeches had overthrown cabinets, whose intrigues had created disorder in Europe and peril for France, whose money had shaped policy, determined the course of trade, and hastened or delayed the progress of Europe towards economic frustration and financial chaos.

I found myself making polite noises and becoming increasingly anxious to take my departure.

I did not, in fact, get away till close on midnight.

On leaving the house I ran into Jonathan Blye. He was in trouble with his car and I offered him a lift or a tow. He chose the former.

"Tell me some more about our hostess," I said, as we drove off.

"Maryse Bertrand is a remarkable woman," said Jonathan Blye. "She put Clementin on the political map and means to keep him there."

I digested this information in silence, as Blye commented with vivacity on the women behind the scenes of French political life. He contrasted, I remember, the influence exercised by women in England and France. In England women had the vote, could sit in Parliament, and were clapped into uniforms. They were accordingly harmless or even useful. In France they were not allowed—nor had they any desire—to enjoy any of these male prerogatives. They were accordingly dangerous and a standing impediment to political progress of any kind.

"Maryse Bertrand," concluded Blye, "is what the French call a 'fatal woman.' There are no fatal women in Westminster."

Jonathan Blye had a studio in the Rue des Saints-Pères. As we drove through the empty streets, he seemed to guess that I had something on my mind.

"Look here, Orford," he said suddenly, "do you really want to know what is going on here in Paris?"

"Certainly I do," I responded.

"Then I'll tell you," said Blye. "It's my firm con-

viction that few of the politicians here have their hearts in the war. Remember that Clementin only obtained his full powers by a very narrow margin of votes in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies and that he has already had to purge his Cabinet more than once. He has enemies to Right and Left of him, who are only waiting for a chance to turn him out. He has had to lock up the men who look to the Left for their deliverance, but the men on the Right are infinitely more dangerous. They don't relish fighting Hitler to a finish—they are looking desperately for a way out. Clementin has staked everything on Weygand's ability to organise the French armies and to save Paris. If Paris is seriously threatened——”

“But surely,” I interrupted, “the heart of France is sound.”

Blye grunted.

“I've lived in France for years,” he said. “I love every cabbage in the garden. I've seen her men on patrol beyond the Maginot Line. I've talked with the French equivalent of Tom, Dick, and Harry—in cafés, on farms, in offices and billets. I've messed with French pilots and lorry drivers. I've written thousands of words about these splendid fellows and every word was straight from the heart. I know better than most men the France that can never die. But I know also something of French politics and of the scoundrels by whom these wise, patient, and clear-sighted people so unaccountably allow themselves to be governed, and I tell you that, if the French armies break, there will be hell to pay.”

He ended suddenly, breathing heavily. An uncomfortable silence followed. Blye normally affects the cynicism with which the more warm-hearted men of his profession hide their enthusiasms from a hard-faced world. To cover his shame he added abruptly, as we came to a halt in the chasm between houses which is the Rue des Saints-Pères:

“Come in and have a drink.”

"I will be getting back, if you don't mind," I said.

I put a hand on his arm as he struggled out of the car.

"Keep in touch with me, Blye," I said.

He laughed, still self-conscious after his outburst. Then he waved a valedictory hand.

"Any time, old man."

Half an hour later I was in bed, and at half-past nine next morning I was shown into the office of General Réhmy.

CHAPTER IV

THE CLUB OF HERCULES

RÉHMY looked up from the pad on which he had been taking notes.

"Privet and Madame Bertrand, you say, are dining together to-morrow?"

"And the 'old man' will be dining, too."

Réhmy nodded and touched a bell. His secretary entered.

"Send Jules," he said briefly.

The secretary left the room.

"Jules," went on Réhmy, as the door closed, "will find out where this meeting is to take place and he will arrange to be present either in person or by proxy. I want you to know him by sight, but remember that, if ever you should see him at work, you must ignore him completely."

The General was in uniform. There were three rows of ribbons on his tunic, including the Legion of Honour. This was a man who had spent more than thirty years in his country's service. He looked desperately tired, but the worn face was resolute. The hair which had once been sandy was now grey, and it had receded from his forehead. There was grey, too, in the close-clipped moustache on his upper lip. It was a very ordinary face. Yet it gave me a feeling of hope and encouragement. This was not a man who would allow himself to be beaten.

The door opened again to admit a short, dark, clean-shaven man with brown eyes, which I can only describe as vacant. His lower lip was full. His mouth hung

open slightly. In normal circumstances I should not have given him a second glance. He was dressed in a neat, worn suit and his fingers were stained with nicotine.

"Jules," said Réhmy, "this is Mr. Orford."

Jules turned his head in my direction.

"Yes, *mon Général*."

"He is liaison with the British Ambassador," continued Réhmy. "As a result of what he has told me I want you to keep an eye on Madame Bertrand for the next three days. She is to dine with Monsieur Privet and a third party. I want a report of their meeting."

"Very good, *mon Général*."

"Thank you, Jules."

He left the room.

"Will he be able to bring it off?" I wondered involuntarily.

Réhmy nodded.

"Jules is one of our best men," he said. "Not much to look at, but you English have a proverb: He is the handsome man whose deeds are handsome."

He smiled gravely.

"Come and see me again when you have anything further to report, Orford," he added, "and don't tell the Ambassador anything about it. As you say in England, the shorter the tale, the soonest mended."

I heard nothing further that day from Réhmy or Jules and, since my orders were to stay put, I did my best to concentrate on the routine work of the Ministry. There was in fact nothing else for me to do. Réhmy had advised me not to warn Frisson of Privet's designs upon his portfolio. To do so, Réhmy had pointed out, might cause Frisson to challenge Privet in some way and put him on his guard. Privet for the moment must not be disturbed. Nothing must prevent him from keeping his dinner appointment with Madame Bertrand and the 'old man.'

Captain Hugon sent for me in the course of the morning. He was, as I think I have already said, the military member of Frisson's cabinet. He was no more a soldier than I was, but in private life an industrialist with big interests in the cotton mills at Lille. His face was grave as I entered the room and he looked at me for a moment in silence. Then he said:-

"What would the English say if we were to set up a Committee of Public Safety?"

I thought for a moment.

"You think it is as bad as that?" I answered.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"We are only trying to look ahead," he said. "If things turn out badly, that is what we ought to do. That is what Frisson wants to do."

I thought it well not to take the suggestion too seriously.

"You Frenchmen are incorrigible," I said. "You have one remedy for every crisis. It is to change your government. And if the crisis is very bad, you change your constitution. Does Frisson think that the French armies are likely to fight any better if your Cabinet, which has already full powers, decides to call itself something different?"

I could be frank with Hugon. He was an honest man.

"A Committee of Public Safety," he pointed out, "is not quite the same thing as a cabinet."

"Would it consist of the same men?" I demanded bluntly.

"The object of the arrangement would be to strengthen the hands of Clementin."

"So that he could, if necessary, lock up a few more deputies," I retorted.

Hugon smiled at my little jest.

"Mind you," he said. "This is between ourselves. But you might try to find out, if you can, how Downing Street would react."

"I will do what I can," I assured him.

I reported this conversation to Henry Cheriton at lunch that day.

"Trouble behind the scenes," he said. "That's what it means. Things are worse than has yet been admitted."

"Any news?" I asked.

"None at the moment. Weygand is making a tour of the battlefield and Clementin is shortly to broadcast a message to the nation."

Broadcast he did, late in the evening, and what he said was not encouraging. The break through on the Meuse was confirmed; unbelievable mistakes had been made; these would be punished. And that night, for the first time, I heard Carap's name freely mentioned in the cafés. He was even reported to have been killed by a bomb on his way, under arrest in his own car, to be court-martialled.

I slept ill that night, and all next day I was haunted by the thought of the dinner-party which was to take place that evening.

I left the office at about seven o'clock, and took an apéritif with Jonathan Blye at the King Charles. He asked me to dine with him, but, on the impulse of the moment, I refused. I found it impossible to settle down.

"Not here. At the usual place."

That is what Madame Bertrand had said. The words haunted me, a perpetual whisper at the back of my mind. They did not convey very much, but they told me one thing—that the dinner-party was not going to take place at Neuilly. She would presumably be leaving her house shortly to attend it. Perhaps I might follow her. Perhaps I might be of assistance to Jules. That was what I felt at the time. Or, rather, that was the excuse which I gave myself for interfering with Réhmy's dispositions. My determination was unnecessary and even rash, but if I had not acted upon it, I might not now be telling this tale.

A quarter of an hour later I was running down the Avenue de la Grande Armée towards the Avenue de Neuilly. A lovely evening light lay over Paris. There were a fair number of cars about, most of them making for the Bois, where the Pré Catalan and other restaurants were still doing a fine trade. People dined early in those days in Paris, for with nightfall came the black-out, when no lights could be shown.

It was about half-past seven when I began to look for the turning into the Rue Windsor. My intention was to stop the car within sight of Madame Bertrand's house, watch for her to come out, and trail her to the party.

There was another car in front of me. It was a small Renault and carried only a driver at the wheel. It was running slowly down the Rue de Longchamps. I knew that I should have to turn to the right, and then immediately to the left, to enter the Rue Windsor. It was at the turning to the right, that is to say, at the junction of the Rue de Longchamps with the Rue du Centre, that it happened.

The Renault was slowing down and moving slightly left to take the corner. At that moment I heard a claxon behind me. I drew into the right and a large van thundered past. It was moving with ponderous but unchecked speed, a large van of the kind used by French furniture removers. It was painted a drab grey and on it was the name of a firm, Machoux et Cie. I shouted in swift dismay. The van, having passed me, was making straight for the Renault, which swung desperately as far as it could to the right to avoid it. It might have succeeded, had it not been that the road was under repair, the holes dug by the workmen being barred off with an arrangement of poles on trestles, decorated with red lamps. The front wing of the Renault struck one of the trestles as its driver made a desperate effort to shoot between the poles guarding the cavities in the road, and

the bonnet of the van struck the Renault just in front of the rear wheel. There was a loud crash. The miserable little car heeled over and fell on its side, completely demolishing the trestles and the poles, and wedging itself into one of the holes in the road. The near front wheel spun in the air.

I jammed on my brakes to avoid running into the two vehicles, which between them completely blocked the right side of the road. Fortunately my brakes were strong, or I should have added to the scene of destruction. I pulled up, in fact, not six feet away from the van.

The driver was sitting crouched above his wheel. Even at that instant, I had time to feel astonishment. On his face appeared no expression of dismay or horror, such as one would expect to see registered instantly upon the countenance of any human creature who has just driven a heavy lorry into a motor-car and turned it almost upside down. On the contrary, the driver—he was wearing a peaked cap, and his chin, even in the evening light, showed a plentiful grey stubble—had a look of resolute, unwinking satisfaction.

The same instant I saw his victim. The man driving the Renault had fallen forward, but his face was twisted upwards, so that I could see it as clearly as I could that of the man driving the van.

It was the face of Jules.

I did some pretty quick thinking. Jules had been knocked out. Therefore Madame Bertrand would be left unattended, and unattended at a critical moment. That was the first and last thought which entered my mind. It may sound inhuman, but I gave no further thought to Jules. After all, we were both of us on active service, even though we were still a hundred miles or so from the front line, and on active service, when attacking you pay no heed to the wounded. I put my foot on the accelerator and, passing the back of the van on my right, continued on my way down the Rue de Longchamps.

Beside me on the seat was a map of Paris on a fairly large scale. It was ready folded and showed me at a glance that, by continuing down the Rue de Longchamps, and turning to the right farther on, I could enter the Rue de la Ferme and thus reached the other end of the Rue Windsor.

I lost no time in putting as large a distance as I could between myself and the scene of the accident, but, on reaching the junction of the Rue Windsor and the Rue de la Ferme, I stopped, pulling the car up in the shade of a plane tree. The road was deserted except for a large black or dark-blue limousine standing outside the gates at the end of the drive leading to Madame Bertrand's house. I had hardly stationed myself under the plane tree when the gates opened and a short, upright figure, which I recognised at once, walked quickly towards the waiting car.

A uniformed chauffeur was at the door of the limousine. With the mechanical gesture of the well-trained servant, he removed his cap with one hand and opened the door with the other. Madame Bertrand said something to him which I naturally could not catch, for they were well out of earshot, being at least sixty yards away. The man shut the door, put on his cap, and sprang to the wheel. A moment later the car moved off, crossing my bows some twenty yards ahead. I bent over the wheel of my own car, so that Madame Bertrand should not see my face.

I gave them fifty yards start. Then I turned my car and made after them, being just in time to see Madame Bertrand's car turn right and make for the Porte de Madrid. I ran behind her, keeping about a hundred and fifty or two hundred yards in the rear.

On reaching the Porte de Madrid, Madame Bertrand's car turned left into the Bois. I followed. We crossed the main Allée de Longchamps, which traverses the Bois from north-east to south-west, and made for the lag

chain of lakes, roughly corresponding to the Serpentine, on which Parisians row and drive motor-boats and generally disport-themselves. For one moment I thought that the car in front was making for the Restaurant Pré Catalan, for it turned left again into the Chemin de Ceinture. It stopped, however, outside a little restaurant where I myself had eaten in happier days before the war. It is called the Croix Catalan and is cheaper and more secluded than its more fashionable and expensive neighbour half a mile away.

I thought it best to drive slowly past. Presently I heard the big car moving behind me and shortly it passed me going in the direction of the Racing Club. As soon as it was out of sight I pulled up, left my car, and walked back two hundred yards or so.

The restaurant, as I knew from past experience, was a little brick building constructed in the form of a miniature château and surrounded on two sides by a garden in which the clients are served. On all sides, save that of the road, crowd the magnificent trees which make the Bois one of the loveliest parks in Europe.

Between the trees and the restaurant was a tall hedge of privet. I quitted the road and, hidden by the trees, made my way towards the hedge. Here I was for the moment baulked by a small stream, about six feet wide, which flowed along the hedge, presumably into the lakes a few hundred yards away on the right. The stream was sluggish and looked shallow. It was overgrown with hemlocks and water plants. There was nothing for it but to wade across, for to jump it might have made too much noise. This I did, sinking softly into a bed of soft, viscious mud almost up to the knees. Clutching the stout stems of a couple of hemlocks, however, I succeeded in pulling myself up on to the farther bank.

Now I could look through the privet hedge. The iron tables, covered with cloths of red-and-white check, seemed deserted, but only for a moment.

here that the breeze comes round the corner through the trees."

Gilloz had already intervened.

"This way," he was saying.

They rose and walked back the way they had come, making for a table on the far side of the restaurant.

I turned about and began to crawl back, moving this time a little faster, for I intended to miss none of the conversation and I had some way to go. I had not gone ten yards, however, when a heavy hand fell on my shoulder.

"Now then, what are you doing here?"

I half turned. A whiff of strong tobacco and stale wine struck me in the face and, above me, louting like Orion on one knee, his left hand grasping my collar and his right hand upholding a truncheon, stood a policeman of Paris.

As often happens in a crisis there flashed into my mind a phrase which, though it met the situation, brought little comfort.

"Who shall wrest the club from Hercules?"

The answer did not seem to be forthcoming and the club seemed likely to descend upon my unprotected head, if I showed the slightest signs of resistance.

"One moment," I said. "I will explain."

Nine in ten Paris policemen can be mollified with a discreet blend of tact, hauteur, and generosity. I accordingly made ready to convey to this member of the Force—hoping that he would not prove to be the incorruptible tenth man—that I respected him for his zeal but considered it ill-timed, that the uncle of my best friend was a senator and his father a deputy, and that in my opinion, which I was prepared to back to the extent of a hundred-franc note, his duty to the public urgently required his presence elsewhere.

I was, however, saved the necessity of further parley. For, even as I struggled to remove the policeman's hand from my coat collar, there came a rustle from the other

side of the stream and a short figure appeared suddenly behind my captor, who instinctively turned his head.

It was a fatal move.

A fist, planted with accuracy and considerable force, landed promptly on the point of his jaw. He staggered backwards. Whereupon the man who had struck him wrested the truncheon from his nerveless grasp and hit him with it shrewdly on the side of the neck. The policeman fell to the ground and I found myself facing the newcomer over his prostrate body.

It was Colonel Granby.

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CHAPTER V
FIFTH COLUMN

"QUICK," said Granby in a whisper. "Give me a hand."

I bent down and took up the policeman's legs. Granby already had him by the shoulders. We staggered with him a few yards and laid him in a bed of hemlocks.

"Now get back and keep your ears open," said Granby. "I shall take this fellow's place and keep guard."

I moved along the line of the privet hedge until I found myself within a yard or two of the table at which Madame Bertrand had now settled down with her guests. The slight noise made by the recent assault and counter-assault had obviously not been overheard.

Madame Bertrand was speaking:

"I quite agree, my dear Marshal, the wine of Bordeaux is to be preferred. I recommend the *Cos d'Estournel*."

I expected that the first few moments would pass in a polite exchange of platitudes. But this was not the case.

"We have not much time, Marshal," Madame Bertrand continued. "I know that you are a busy man. It is very good of you to spare us the time."

The old man took two or three spoonfuls of soup before he answered.

I had leisure to inspect Madame Bertrand and I was astonished by what I saw. She was in black and wore no jewels. Her hair, brushed back smoothly, conveyed a suggestion of Madonna-like simplicity. Round her neck was a fine chain from which hung a small golden cross and she was made up carefully to look as though she were not made up at all. On her face was an expression of settled melancholy. She looked like someone in mourning for the sins of France.

I do not know to what extent the Marshal was aware of all this, but he could hardly fail to be impressed by the general effect.

"Madam," he said, "I am not so busy as you seem to think. Clementin sees to everything."

"And Weygand?"

"General Weygand makes his report daily to the Cabinet. We listen and approve."

"But my dear Marshal," broke in Privet, "surely you are consulted? The first soldier of France is not in the Cabinet merely to receive the reports of General Weygand."

Privet paused abruptly.

"I'm sorry, sir," he added. "Perhaps I am being indiscreet."

It was well done. He was looking at the Marshal almost with veneration. He seemed to be speaking from the heart. All his gestures were large and generous. His face was mobile and keen. He sat in profile to me, on Madame Bertrand's left. Opposite him was the old Marshal, now dabbling delicately at his moustaches with a napkin.

"France," he said, "has chosen her leaders. For the moment we can only follow them and pray that all may yet be retrieved. Weygand is a good soldier."

"General Gamelin was also a good soldier. So we were given to understand," said Privet softly.

"He could not achieve the impossible," responded the Marshal. "France is paying for years of illusion and neglect. She needs now her unborn children and the weapons she was too idle to forge."

Madame Bertrand nodded silently. She was fingering the cross on her breast and looking towards the Marshal in a rapture of mournful acquiescence.

"Above all," she added softly, "France lacks faith. She has turned aside from the simple pieties which alone can make a nation strong in defence."

ELEVEN WERE BRAVE

The Marshall nodded his approval.
"You are right, Madam. That, indeed, is the heart of the matter. France can never wholly be restored till she recovers her ancient virtues, and this she can never do, I fear, except through suffering and sacrifice."

The old man spoke with energy. There was a dreadful relish in his tone—something between the sombre satisfaction of a stern prophet rebuking a stubborn generation and the righteous severity of a parent condemning his children to the bread and water of affliction.

Privet leaned forward over the table.
"You do not then believe," he said, "that Weygand can succeed?"

"I do not say that," continued the Marshal. "But his task is greater than he suspects. He hopes to reorganise the armies. But can he change the soul and spirit of the people? I have been looking at the files. The Ninth Army, Carap's army, is riddled with communism. How can such men be expected to fight?"

"Many of their leaders, their peace-time leaders, I mean, have been arrested," said Madame Bertrand softly. "They find that, perhaps, not too encouraging."

I looked at her keenly. But there was not a trace of irony in her tone or expression. Nor did the old man suspect it. He was now engaged on a mushroom omelette. He laid down his fork.

"They would not fight," he said, "because they have no heart in this war."

"In that, perhaps, they do not stand alone," murmured Privet.

The Marshal looked across at him suspiciously. Then he leaned across the table.

"It is true," he said, "that there are others who think that this war is a mistake and that France should never have entered it. I have myself great sympathy with that view. This is not France's war. There is more than one French statesman who believes, and still believes

that this tragedy could have been avoided. I hold no brief for Hitler's Germany, but it is madness to be fighting the only country in Europe which might have stood between us and the Red hordes of Moscow. See now where we stand. If the French armies break again, there will be a revolution in France. Our beloved country will fall into the hands of men who do not believe in the family, who do not believe in God. We have seen that evil day approaching for many years past. I know these men of the Left. Who was it but their apostle Briand who, thirty years ago, boasted that France had thrown out Jesus Christ. That was how it all started. Who can be surprised if now we stand on the brink of disaster?"

"It goes back earlier than Briand," put in Privet. "Past 1870, past 1848. It goes back to the Revolution of 1789."

"I do not think we need lose ourselves in history," broke in Madame Bertrand quietly, but Privet's words had roused the old Marshal.

"You are right, Monsieur," he said. "Christian France was struck down in 1789. From that moment she has led the nations astray with her Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Our people once had a creed. To-day they have only catchwords. After the men of the Revolution, with their blasphemies, came the men of '48 who killed the Archbishop of Paris on the barricades and the men of '71 who caused the streets of this capital city to run with blood. Those men are still with us, and, at this moment, we are turning the weapons which we might have used against the Communists against a nation with which we might have composed our hereditary quarrel in a common cause. We must change our national device. For Liberty, discipline in service of the fatherland; for Equality, the rights and sanctity of the family; for Fraternity, the bond of labour and service."

The old man's face was flushed. For the moment he had forgotten his surroundings.

He came to himself with a jerk and returned to the omelette, which he had allowed to grow cold on his plate.

I looked at his companions. They were staring at the Marshal in silent admiration, as though they had received a message from Sinai or the Mount itself. They were, I reflected, accustomed to hear such views, but men of the Right, like Daudet or Maurras, could at least utter their nonsense plausibly. I marvelled at Privet's self-control in contriving to support with deference the old man's pious travesty.

Madame Bertrand sighed deeply.

"How right you are! What an analysis!" she breathed.

Privet, however, had an eye to business. The Marshal was evidently in the right frame of mind. He must now be brought down to practical politics.

"You do not think," he repeated softly, "that Weygand can succeed?"

The Marshal shrugged his shoulders and fingered his moustache.

"I will not say that," he said; "*tout peut se rétablir*—all may yet be well."

It was the phrase which Napoleon III had used in his message to Eugénie. I heard it now on the lips of a Marshal of France, on a night in the last week of May 1940, when the French armies were hurriedly re-forming to meet the Germans almost at the gates of Paris.

"Weygand has a plan," continued the Marshal. "But clearly we must be prepared for the worst."

Privet sat back, while the waiter busied himself filling the glasses with wine. When the waiter had gone Privet leaned forward again.

"As you say, sir, we must be prepared for the worst. That, indeed, is why we have taken the liberty of asking you to dine with us this evening."

He sat back and glanced at Madame Bertrand. She took the cue promptly, speaking with an admirable gravity.

"We have come to the conclusion, Marshal," she said, "that, if the worst should happen, Clementin would not be the man best fitted to deal with the situation. He is the sort of man who refuses to admit defeat even when it has to be faced. It may be necessary to come to terms with the enemy, to make an honourable peace as between soldiers with the German High Command. Clementin is obviously not the man for such a task."

She paused a moment. She laid a hand with a down-cast, urgent timidity on the Marshal's sleeve.

"It is for that reason that we look to you, Monsieur le Maréchal," she continued, turning her dark eyes upon the old man with an expression of melancholy resignation. "We are not without influence. Privet here, as you know, controls a very important section of the Press. I myself can also be of service in more than one quarter. It is clear to us what should be done, It is you, Monsieur le Maréchal, who, in the supreme hour of sacrifice, should be at the head of affairs. I implore you not to hesitate a moment. Fulfil your destiny, my dear Marshal, and you may yet be the saviour of France."

There was a short silence. I stared through the hedge in helpless fascination. Was this how French Cabinets were made? Privet had pulled out a sheet of paper, and in his hand was a fountain-pen. He was looking expectantly at the Marshal. The old man glanced first at him and then at Madame Bertrand.

"Two questions," he said at last, and his voice took on the echo of what, in his young days, forty years before, was the voice of a great soldier. "First, have I, in fact, not only a reasonable, but a certain, chance of taking the place you have in mind? I will not, you must understand, be personally involved in any political intrigue.

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the call comes, I am with you. But I will have nothing to do with your votes and parties." Privet nodded gravely. "I have here a list of persons, which I will read to you," he said, "who will be definitely pledged to your support."

He began to read out a list of, perhaps, a dozen names. Two or three I had never heard of, but most of them I knew. They were all of the Right. They included, I noted, the president and vice-president of the *Comité des Forges* as well as the proprietors of two newspapers, whom I had thought to be the rivals of Privet, and two large industrialists from Lyons. It included also the notorious Lucien Rever, prophet of appeasement, ex-Premier of France, most secret and subtle of the men of Munich.

"These are certainties," said Privet. "There are many others who will join us when the moment comes." "What is the second condition, Marshal?" put in Madame Bertrand.

But the old Marshal raised a hand.

"One moment, Madam," he said; "let us get this first point clear. I should like to know who my probable supporters would be."

Privet began reading again. The old man listened attentively, leaning across the table, one hand held to his ear, the other beating a soundless tattoo beside his plate.

"That is good," he murmured when Privet had done. "I should like a copy of that list."

A quick look of apprehension gleamed in Privet's eyes. "Of course," he said. "I will send you one to-morrow. But this is the only list in my possession."

"To-morrow will do," answered Villebois. "Your second condition?" repeated Madame Bertrand.

I detected a faint note of impatience in her voice. "My second condition," said Villebois slowly, "is

I am allowed full control. I must choose whom I like to do what I command. That must be understood."

"It is, of course, understood," said Madame Bertrand softly. "You shall have an entirely free hand. That we can certainly promise you."

Once more there was silence.

"In that case," said the Marshal at last, "I accept."

Madame Bertrand raised her glass. "This is a solemn moment. Monsieur Privet, I ask you to drink with me, to the saviour of France."

Privet lifted his glass. "To the saviour of France," he repeated.

I like to think that destiny took a hand in what followed, turning their false solemnity to farce. For hardly had they set down their glasses than there came a scuffling on the gravel floor of the garden and a grotesque figure broke from the shadows. It wore a blue shirt and a pair of long white pants, ending in socks, upheld by suspenders. It came to a halt, swaying a little, a few paces from the table.

"My clothes," it muttered. "In the name of the law, my clothes."

"What the devil!" exclaimed Privet. "Waiter! Patron!"

But already the proprietor was approaching.

"A thousand pardons," he was saying. "But do not disturb yourselves. There is a policeman here. He will deal with this intruder."

A policeman, who had followed the proprietor to the table, stepped forward:

"Now then," he said, advancing upon the figure in the pants, "what does this mean? You undress yourself. You exhibit yourself to these persons at dinner. It is an outrage upon public decency. Come with me at once."

Granby—for he had put into effect his suggestion of changing places with his late victim, who now stood before him stripped to his underwear—was evidently

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enjoying himself. He looked aside at Madame Bertrand.
"Courage, Madam," he said. "This unfortunate
person is harmless. I will see that he does not actively
molest you."

I might have been amused at this preposterous scene,
but I noted with alarm that the eyes of the man in the
pants were fixed upon the collar of Granby's stolar
uniform. He pointed an accusing finger at his lat
assailant.

"Five hundred and twenty-one," he screamed.
"That is my number. This man is wearing my coat.
Look well and you will perceive a tear in the right sleeve
invisibly mended by my wife's sister."

Granby lifted his truncheon.
"Come," he said, and seized the unfortunate police-
man roughly by the arm. "We will go at once to the
station. There you will be charged under Article 473,
sub-section 14 of the Code, for committing an outrage
to morals in a public place. But first, where are your
trousers?"

Already Granby had forced his victim half-way to the
door of the restaurant. I drew back, wrestling with a
strong desire to laugh aloud.

Colonel Granby, wearing the clothes of a Paris
policeman, was taking a Paris policeman off to gaol.

CHAPTER VI

BATTLE FRONT

I WILL not linger upon the scene which, ten minutes later, took place in a secluded part of the Bois, where Granby once more changed clothes with his late victim. The man's wounds, physical and moral, were healed by a plentiful application of flattery and condolence, a transfer of bank-notes, to the tune of three thousand francs, and a good deal of commentary from both sides on the vicissitudes of life and the frailty of human nature.

"All losses are restored and sorrows end," murmured Granby, as we left the policeman under the summer trees, gruff with gratitude, but still not quite sure how or why he had come to be bribed on a scale exceeding his most liberal expectations.

Granby listened silently to my account of the conversation at Neuilly as we drove from the Bois towards the Place de l'Etoile.

"All this must to Lord Burleigh's car," he said as we reached the Arc de Triomphe.

"You seem full of quotations this evening," I observed.

"As an egg is of meat," he answered tiresomely.

"What's the time, John?"

"Close on midnight."

"We must find a bed for me."

"Come to my hotel."

"Good! You can entertain me there with brandy, for the cafés are closed for the night."

Not another word would he say till we had reached the hotel. Parking the car in the courtyard, while Granby booked a room at the desk, I reached the sitting-room and peeped into Cheriton's bedroom. He was sound asleep.

"Granby," I said, as I produced brandy from an ornate buhl cabinet, "you haven't told me yet how you happened to show up at the dinner-party."

"I returned to Paris this afternoon and saw Réhmy. He told me about Jules and I decided to take his place. It seemed to us both that I should better appreciate what was to be said at the party. So off I went and I was just behind you in another car, when I, too, witnessed the accident. Naturally, I followed you to the Bois and, when I saw you were in difficulties with the policeman, I saw it was time to intervene."

"You certainly have a most uncanny way of turning up quite unexpectedly," I observed.

Granby sighed.

"In the days of my youth," he said, "I made rather a point of it. They called me the Cheshire Cat because I usually turned up smiling. It's a habit I have when nervous. I was the *deus ex machina* of the Service. But the machine grows rusty."

He finished his brandy.

"And so to bed," he continued. "But first you must put on paper a record of the conversation at the Croix Catalan. Two copies, please, and bring one of them to me. Room 64."

He left me before I had time to protest. I was dog-tired, but Granby at work overlooks such small matters as sleep or eating or even drinking.

I was fortunate in finding some carbon paper, so that I did not have to copy my record twice. It took me, however, a good two hours to finish it.

I found Granby asleep in his clothes on the bed. I pressed the lobe of his ear, which is the best way to wake a sleeping person if you don't want him to jump up with a start.

He read through my transcription in silence.

"I need not stress the importance of this," he said at last, putting the sheets into his pocket. "I shall catch

the early-morning plane and take it straight to Downing Street. You will deliver your copy to General Réhmy. Expect me back to-morrow, or rather to-day."

I snatched a few hours' sleep and rose at half-past eight. Cheriton reminded me, while he was shaving, that I was due that day to take a party of British journalists up the line to see something of the French Army. A conducted tour had been arranged, a day or two previously, to keep the poor fellows happy. Since the real fighting had begun, they had been kept kicking their heels in Paris.

On my way to the Ministry I called on General Réhmy and handed him the carbon copy of my record. Like Granby, he read it through in silence. Then he looked at me.

"You wrote this yourself?"

"Yes."

"And you were present when all this took place?"

"I heard every word."

"And Colonel Granby has taken a copy to the British Prime Minister?"

"He left by air at dawn."

Réhmy nodded.

"This copy," he said, tapping the sheets of paper in front of him, "must go at once to Clementin, and it is obviously desirable that, when he reads it, he should have an opportunity of seeing you. He will have it then, as you say in England, straight from the donkey's mouth."

This, I thought, might have been better put.

"I understand that Monsieur Clementin is with the troops," I responded. "So, at least, the papers say."

"And you, it is reported, are going up to General Headquarters with a party of journalists. You can combine the two missions. As you say in England, we kill two birds in one bush."

A quarter of an hour later, having first had a few words on the strategical situation with Hugon, I was

sitting beside Jonathan Blyc in the first of half a dozen cars, heading for Vitry le François, where the journalists were to be taken in charge by liaison officers of the *Deuxième Bureau* and given an opportunity of seeing the French Army in process of reorganisation after the disaster of the Meuse.

"And I understand," said Jonathan Blye, "that we are going to be shown some real tanks. They are being collected there, I am told, for a counter-attack."

"About time, too," I said shortly.

He looked at me.

"They have had the hell of a knock," he said, "and they are still dizzy."

"Have you looked at a map lately?"

He stared at me accusingly.

"You're thinking of the B.E.F.," he said.

"We counter-attacked at Arras this morning and were successful. But the gap between Arras and Bapaume is still open and will remain open unless Weygand can strike up from the South."

"Is that the famous plan?"

"It's common sense," I retorted.

The weather was fine and the road was still good, despite the amount of military traffic which had passed along it. But my spirits were low and refused to rise. I was thinking, not only of the conversation which I had overheard the night before, depressing enough in all conscience, but of the fields of Flanders where I had fought twenty years before. There had been from the first a quality almost of hallucination about this new war, as though we were hypnotically repeating a tragedy which human wisdom seemed unable to avoid once in a generation. I had hitherto pinned my faith to that cry from the heart of every Frenchman: *il faut en finir*—never again, we must make an end of this. But now I knew that behind the scenes there were men who, with defeat in their souls, were reaching for a long spoon with

which they were prepared, if necessary, to sup with the devil. I had heard the first soldier of France making ready for surrender at a moment when the armies of France were being asked to die in her defence. This thought gave a nightmare quality to everything I saw upon the long road to the fighting front. Now it was a battery of 75's making swiftly to the west, or a solitary despatch rider passing us in a whirl of dust on his motor-bicycle, or a string of lorries camouflaged, for the most part, with green boughs, moving to the battle front like the wood of Birnam come to Dunsinane.

The villages through which we passed were untouched by shell-fire. They were still inhabited, mostly by women, children, and grandfathers, all the men up to the age of fifty being with the colours. I saw these people at work in the fields as we went by, patient, absorbed, never looking up from their labour.

I could see nothing wrong with the heart or spirit of France, and gradually the scene at Neuilly receded into the background. I almost ceased to believe that I had heard or seen Privet with his list of men ready to make terms with the enemy, and the old Marshal bending his ear to listen and approve.

We stopped once only to inspect an aerodrome and take a drink with the officers' mess. The air field was beside a wood, in which a number of Morane fighters were hidden. I talked with a young, brown-faced flying man. There were no defeatists here. On the contrary there was a desire, amounting almost to madness, to be at daily grips with the Hun.

I also had a word with a non-commissioned officer in charge of a lorry fitted out as a pigeon loft. He was a burly sergeant, who talked with the accent of the Midi about his birds: how strong on the wing they were, how fearless, and the remarkably short space of time in which they learnt to fly back to their loft. These pigeons, he told me, were carried by reconnaissance machines on

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long-distance flights. They were also used, I gathered, by the light tanks, and even by the infantry.

The newspaper correspondents were not professionally interested, for they were not allowed to mention in their despatches this time-honoured method of communication. Both the Germans and the French used carrier pigeons, and both knew this to be the case; but, as Jonathan Blye reminded us, the first principle of censorship is to assume that the enemy knows nothing that you can successfully conceal from yourself.

As we returned to our cars, I noted that the number of the travelling pigeons' cot was PAR.6772. It annoyed me to read the number, for, once I set eyes on a figure, I find it difficult to forget. Some people are like that.

We reached Vitry le François at about noon, and I immediately set about arranging for the journalists to have an opportunity of acquiring as much information as possible, my task being rendered considerably easier by three very efficient officers of the *Deuxième Bureau*. I need scarcely say that there was some hearty grumbling about what they were and were not allowed to see. Everything, of course, had been very carefully stage-managed. There were quantities of tanks, for example, camouflaged mostly with netting, stationed under the trees in the market square. These they were permitted to inspect, but they were only allowed to speak to certain selected members of the crews. This restriction was not imposed openly—in fact, an ordinary person would not have realised that there had been any discrimination. Journalists, however, are not easily deceived. They seem to know at once when they are being shown something which they are expected to describe and at once decide to look elsewhere.

We saw nothing at Vitry le François, to suggest panic or confusion. The bronze-faced crews of the tanks were alert and keen. They displayed, so far as I could judge, enthusiasm and confidence. They spoke openly of the

German successes on the Meuse, but almost seemed to welcome them.

"Now," said one driver to me, "it will be a war of movement. That is where we shall score," and he slapped the side of his tank as he spoke, on which, I remember, the outline of a rhinoceros charging had been stencilled in a very vivid manner by some artist who knew how to convey an impression of ponderous speed with a few quick strokes of the brush.

The journalists were soon busy noticing the things which they were not intended to see. So I drew one of the officers of the *Deuxième Bureau* aside and asked for Commandant Machoux. He went in search of him and presently returned in the company of a middle-aged man with greying hair who drew himself up and saluted.

"I understand," I said, "that the Prime Minister is here. I have a message for him and have instructions to deliver it as soon as possible."

"Certainly," he said. "I will arrange it with Monsieur Grosjean, his Chef de Cabinet. Come and drink a glass of vermouth in the *popotte* while I arrange it."

He led the way towards a château on the west side of the town. It was beautifully situated in its own grounds, as the estate agents would say, and these were surrounded by a dilapidated wall which enclosed a park, small in extent and full of rank grass and bushes. A pair of iron gates stood in the middle of the wall. These were guarded by sentries. The château itself was of the usual pattern, with an ornamental stucco front and high-pitched grey-slatted roofs. The windows of the principal rooms on the ground floor were wide open and a stream of officers and orderlies was moving about. Festoons of army telephone wires entered the building at various points, and from time to time I heard the high-pitched note of a wireless transmitter.

My companion took me through a side door into a room which must have belonged in past time to the

housekeeper. Now it had been transformed into the mess of the officers of the *Deuxième Bureau* attached to G.Q.G. There was a table running down the middle of it, set for lunch. There were flowers and napkins, some with rings round them and some tied with pieces of coloured ribbon. A bunch of officers was standing in front of an empty hearth and an orderly in shirt-sleeves was carrying round a tray with glasses.

I had entered at a moment when they were evidently engaged in a discussion in which they apparently did not wish me to join, for they broke it off and, as I took a glass from the tray, there was a slight air of constraint. I did not feel wholly at ease with them, perhaps because they were fighting men or close to the fighting line, while I was a mere civilian and, so far as they knew, up from Paris on a joy-ride.

I drank the conventional toast, "*A la victoire*," and conversed with them for some time in a desultory manner. Tremendous efforts, I was assured, were being made to close the gap between Arras and Bapaume. I ventured to talk about the imminence of Weygand's counter-attack, and I had received the grave assent of a captain to my proposition that it would undoubtedly succeed when the middle-aged commandant who had brought me to the château returned and said that Grosjean was waiting to see me.

We crossed a hall paved with white and red tiles and climbed a broad shallow staircase to the first floor, where a sentry in front of a pair of double doors stood to attention. We passed the double doors, and I found myself in a small room with a flamboyant Chinese wallpaper depicting lovers walking over bridges or feeding birds in the midst of an exotic Chinese landscape. The room was severely bare, except for wooden boards laid on trestles on which were numerous papers in wire baskets. In one corner a soldier sat at a typewriter. Grosjean stood by the single window. He was tall, thin, and

clean-shaven, and he was wearing a curious kind of semi-military costume which consisted, among other things, of riding breeches, gaiters, and brown ankle boots of startlingly vivid hue. I had not yet met him in Paris, but I knew, of course, that he was the Chef de Cabinet of the Prime Minister. His post might be described as similar to that of the principal private secretary of an English Premier.

The Commandant from the *Deuxième Bureau* saluted.

"Monsieur Orford from Paris," he said, and withdrew.

Grosjean stepped forward and held out his hand. It was limp and fleshless to the touch. He made a slight motion with his head, at which the soldier seated at the typewriter rose without a word and followed my late companion from the room. Grosjean came at once to the point.

"You wish to see the Prime Minister?" he said.

I bowed.

"If you please," I answered. "I have a message for him."

"From whom?"

"From General Réhmy."

Grosjean's thin black eyebrows curved upwards for a moment.

"Indeed?" he said. "From General Réhmy. I understood that you were a member of the British Embassy."

"Not exactly," I answered. "I act as liaison officer between the Embassy and your Ministry of Information. My business with the Prime Minister is not Embassy business."

He nodded.

"I see," he said. "Unfortunately the Prime Minister is exceedingly busy. Is your message urgent?"

"Most urgent," I answered, "but I shall not keep him long—only a few minutes. The message is in writing.

I have merely to see that he receives it and bear witness to its origin."

"Admirable. Perhaps you will give me the paper. It would save time."

I hesitated a moment. But Grosjean was presumably a man from whom no secrets were hidden. So I put my hand into my breast pocket and pulled out a copy of what I had written in the early hours of the morning.

"You will forgive me, Monsieur," said Grosjean politely as he took the paper from its sealed envelope, "if I read this."

"Of course," I said.

He read through rapidly what I had written, while I stared out of the window. Now and then a despatch rider on a motor-cycle would dash up in a cloud of dust. I was still looking out of the window when Grosjean cleared his throat and I turned towards him.

"This is a very grave and important matter," he said. "But is it really necessary for you to see the Prime Minister? Why not leave the paper with me?"

"My instructions were to deliver the message in person."

Grosjean nodded.

"Then you must certainly see the Prime Minister. Would you be good enough to wait for a moment?"

"Certainly," I answered.

He left the room. I waited for perhaps ten minutes. Then he reappeared.

"The Prime Minister will see you," he said. "Please come this way."

As I turned from the window to follow Grosjean from the room, I had a swift, overwhelming sense of the unreality of my mission. I had been looking forth upon the ordered bustle of the town, the helmeted soldiers in their blue or khaki uniforms, the sentries marching up and down in that careless manner which concealed great vigilance. Surely things were far from desperate. Here

were men on the job, at grips with the enemy. Paris, with its rumours and jitterbugs and its intriguing officials, belonged to another world.

Grosjean had opened a door and stood beckoning. He stood aside to allow me to pass through into a wide lofty drawing-room, still partially furnished with some good old pieces left behind by the owner, supplemented incongruously enough by hard wooden chairs collected from anywhere and the inevitable large table. This one was spread with maps in which many pins were sticking. Above the mantelpiece was a piece of tapestry in which a faded goddess, armed with spear and shield, rode in a triumphal car drawn by unicorns over a stricken field. The room was very hot, for the windows were shut. It was empty and, between two windows, stood an ornate table, an affair of buhl elaborately inlaid and neatly arranged with a virgin blotting-pad, pen, ink, a box of cigarettes, an ash-tray, and a large automatic lighter. Of Clementin there was no sign.

"He will be here in a moment," said Grosjean in my ear. "He is just coming back from an inspection. That will be his car."

Two musical notes had sounded on a horn in the courtyard below. Two minutes later Clementin entered the room. He advanced towards me lightly, stepping on the balls of his feet. The round face, with its two chins, familiar from a hundred pictures on the screen and in the Press, was paler than I had expected, and there were dark pouches beneath his shrewd brown eyes. His hands were never still for a moment, but were constantly playing with the lapels of the curious double-breasted coat that he was wearing, every button of which was doing its full duty. Like his Chef de Cabinet, he wore a loose pair of riding breeches, gaiters, and black boots. These were very dusty. He looked at me for a moment, but, before he could speak, Grosjean had intervened.

"This, Monsieur le Président," he said, "is Mr.

Orford, from Paris. He is the British liaison officer with our Ministry of Information."

"Much honoured, Monsieur le Président," I said, bowing over his hand, which fluttered in my grasp like a bird and was quickly withdrawn. As I spoke, a buzzer sounded sharply in the room next door.

"Sit down, Mr. Orford," said Clementin in a curiously husky voice. "I'm afraid I can't give you long, but I understand your business is urgent."

"It can certainly be described as such," I answered, sitting obediently on a hard chair drawn up close to his own desk, at which he, too, had seated himself. "But my message is in writing. I left the paper with your Chef de Cabinet."

Here I glanced round and saw that Grosjean was no longer in the room. But the door, I noticed, was open.

"Yes," said Clementin. "Where is Grosjean?"

He put his hand out to a row of buttons on the desk, but, before he could ring, Grosjean appeared in the open doorway. He went straight up to Clementin, bent over the desk, and said something I could not catch.

"Immediately?" said Clementin.

"The matter is most pressing, Monsieur le Président."

Clementin was already on his feet. He looked across at me.

"Forgive me, Monsieur. . . ."

"Monsieur Orford," Grosjean prompted.

"Monsieur Orford. I am afraid this is an extremely urgent matter. You must forgive me if I ask you to wait."

"Of course, Monsieur le Président," I answered.

Grosjean was already leading me from the room. A figure in the uniform of a French General had entered briskly. I recognised General Weygand. His face was grave.

I kicked my heels in the ante-room for the better part

of an hour. My only companion was the soldier typist, who rattled away industriously at his keys and paid me no attention whatever. It was beginning to grow late, long past the usual luncheon hour of the French, when the door opened again. Grosjean was full of apologies.

"Monsieur le Président," he said, "has had to leave the château, but he has asked that you should follow him. He has gone farther up the line."

"He has not yet had time to read what I gave you, I suppose?"

Grosjean shook his head.

"Not yet. But he will certainly have time to read it before he sees you. That will make it quicker for you both. Of course you have had no lunch? That we can remedy."

He led me to a waiting staff car, which drove us a few hundred yards to the square. We entered a little restaurant and shared an omelette. Grosjean was very affable. We talked, I remember, about the plays of Jean Giraudoux, whom we equally admired.

At the end of about twenty minutes Grosjean rose.

"Now you must be going, Monsieur," he said. "The car is at your disposal and, when you have finished your business, it will take you back to Paris."

"I am sorry to give you all this trouble," I began, but he waved his hand.

"Your mission to his Excellency is of great importance," he answered gravely.

Outside, with the open car, was a young *officier d'ordonnance* from General Headquarters. He saluted smartly and motioned me to get in first. I sat back in the sunshine. The car made off at great speed to the north-west. We had to slow down very soon, however, for the roads, in addition to military transport—lines of lorries for the most part with here and there a mobile gun tractor—were cumbered with a very different kind of traffic proceeding in the opposite direction. These

were the first refugees I had seen—grey-faced people, very silent and seeming to be driven forward by an invisible hand which pushed them straight ahead, looking neither to right nor left. Many were in motor-cars, old Citroëns and Renaults, piled with strange assortments of household goods with a child tucked here and there among bedding and pots and pans. Whenever they stopped, which was very frequently, those on foot, who were leading their beasts, sat down.

Little details I remember clearly enough. One equipage consisted of a huge, old-fashioned cart with high wooden wheels that turned slowly upon strident axles. It was drawn by three magnificent Percheron horses, harnessed with rope one behind the other, and driven by an old man with a bloody bandage across his forehead and his left arm thrust into the opening of his brown-braided coat. Then there was a woman with a boy of six standing beside her. She was carrying two suitcases joined by a piece of clothes-line slung over her thin shoulders. Her eyes were deep in their sockets and the sweat and tears smeared the dust on her cheeks. I made to speak to her, for the car was stationary in one of the numerous traffic blocks, but was restrained by the young officer at my side.

"It is no good," he said; "nothing can be done."

"Money," I muttered.

"She cannot eat it," was his answer.

My last impression was of a Red Cross Ambulance car pulled out from the road into a field. Two men in shirt-sleeves were blotting out the red crosses with some dark-green paint. One of them turned his head as we went past at a walking pace. I had never met him personally, but I recognised the face. It was Richard Williams, the American film star. I heard him say as we passed, in the accents of Boston, evidently concluding an argument with his companion: "It's the kids who get me down, and that last bunch, peppered and

slashed way back in the road this morning, made me feel not so tough, as I reckoned."

The country over which we were moving was wide and open. Great fields rolled away on either side of the road, alternating with chalk downs. We were approaching the Montagne de France, of which the key town is Rheims, through which we passed at about three in the afternoon. Barring one or two houses destroyed by bombs, the city was intact. The magnificent cathedral stood foursquare in the sunlight.

The mood and bearing of the young lieutenant by my side filled me with a strange foreboding. There was no fear in him. Indeed, on the solitary occasion when a German plane swooped down on the road out of the sun, and we took to the ditch by the side of the road as it strafed the column, fortunately without any effect, he showed himself to be cool, collected, almost indifferent. Nor did he seem either tired or despondent. But there was no life or spring in him. His spirit was stale and he lacked faith. He was like one of Mr. Ford's workers who has turned the same nut 40,000 times a week. He seemed ready to face the worst, already convinced that the worst would happen. When I talked to him of the counter-attack which Weygand was expected to deliver, he looked at me without speaking for a moment, and then said:

"Ca sera terriblement dur."

"A stiff job," I agreed. "But so it was twenty years ago when I was a soldier in this part of the world. Yet the Boche didn't get away with it then and won't get away with it now."

He looked at me again and shrugged his shoulders.

"Vous croyez?" he said.

Two and a half hours' drive brought us eventually to the outskirts of a small town. Here it was evident that a battle was in progress. A battery of French field howitzers was in position at the side of the road. The

men in their shirt-sleeves were firing the guns as fast as they could serve them. The noise was deafening. It drowned the sound of the shells and bombs which were beginning to burst uncomfortably close.

The Germans were bombing the place as we arrived, and I saw the houses crumbling under the orange explosions. What I did not see were any British or French fighters. The Boche planes were having it all their own way.

We turned off the road, and presently reached another château, built, like the first, of stone and stucco, but smaller and surrounded by trees. This, I decided, must be the headquarters of the Divisional General. Clementin was evidently determined to get as near to the front line as he possibly could.

"This way," said the lieutenant as we left the car.

He led me past two sentries to a small room on the ground floor. It contained two dilapidated arm-chairs, an old carpet, and a large portrait in oils of an ecclesiastic of the seventeenth century.

"Wait here, Monsieur," he said.

It was a hot summer day. There was no glass in the solitary window of the room where I was sitting. It had been blown out though a stout iron grille covering the window was still in place.

I waited an hour. Then, growing impatient, I walked across the room, intending to find out what was happening.

I put my hand on the door.

It was locked.

CHAPTER VII

JERRY INTERVENES

THE door was stout and did not yield. I shouted "Hi" and then "*Il-y-a-quelqu'un?*" But there was no answer. My shouting had no effect, and, after a moment or two, I went back, flung myself into the lesser dilapidated of the chairs, and began to think.

Had the key been turned upon me carelessly, or was I indeed, a prisoner? And if I were a prisoner, was it by order of Clementin or of someone who was determined to prevent me from fulfilling my mission? But Clementin already had my record of the conversation at the Croix Catalan? So, at least, Grosjean had informed me.

Suppose, however, that Grosjean himself were a traitor? I was beginning to prefer that honest, old-fashioned term to describe the defeatists and members of the fifth column who had been the ruin of Norway and Holland and were also now active in Belgium and in France.

Certain vague fears, so vague indeed that I have not hitherto mentioned them, came crowding in upon me. There had been, for example, that furniture van which had demolished the car of Jules and cut short his inquiries on the night of the dinner-party. I recalled the face of the driver. He had shown no fear or dismay. His features had worn the expression of a man who had successfully completed a job of work. Was I to be another job of work for somebody?

But these were tactics of the underworld. Clementin himself could not be a party to such proceedings. Did Clementin, however, know anything of my vital errand?

I had seen him only for a moment. I had told him nothing and I had given my record of the Privet conspiracy to Grosjean, who had read it in my presence. Had he passed it on to his chief?

My first reaction of indignation and alarm gave place to anger. I was, I decided, the victim of a plot. These men intended to keep my mouth shut. But if that were the case, why had they brought me all the way up to the battle front in the train of the Prime Minister?

I had reached this stage in my reflections when I heard the key turn in the lock. The door opened and a man entered. It was Vespasien Privet.

He was in civilian clothes, over which he wore a light fawn-coloured overcoat with a belt. He greeted me with a dazzling smile, in which there was no cordiality.

"You have been kept waiting," he said. "I am so sorry."

"It is of no consequence," I responded.

To lose my temper, I decided, would be fatal. At all costs I must keep cool. We stood a moment facing each other. Then Privet waved me back to my chair.

"Let us sit down," he said. "I want to talk to you, Mr. Orford."

"The Prime Minister," I began.

"Still not available, I'm afraid," answered Privet smoothly. "You have no idea how busy he is."

I sat down. My lips were dry. There was another silence. Evidently Privet was at a loss. Yet he held all the cards. He put his hand out suddenly. In it was a gold cigarette-case.

"Will you smoke?" he asked.

I took one of his cigarettes. They were fat and vulgar, like the case, and faintly scented. I fumbled in my pocket for a match, but he forestalled me with a lighter.

"You are liaison officer, are you not, with the Ministry of Information?" he said.

"I am."

"That means," he said quietly, "that you will soon have to do with me."

I knew, of course, that he hoped to supplant Frisson, but did he know that I knew it? I said nothing and looked for him to continue.

"Yes," went on Vespasien Privet, speaking with a quiet geniality, "I am shortly to take Monsieur Frisson's place. We shall soon have the pleasure of working together."

"I am much honoured," I said.

"We shall both have plenty of work to do," went on Privet with a gracious wave of the hand. "I am, you know, a journalist by profession."

"Of course," I answered. "I know your papers well."

"I am a man of quick decisions," continued Privet. "I shall make considerable alterations when I take charge at the Ministry. I disapprove of decentralisation. I contemplate handling most of the work myself. And you shall have access to me at all times."

"That is most good of you," I answered. "I had already the entry to Monsieur Frisson."

"I know. But Frisson's methods differ greatly from mine."

"I shall hope to be of service," I answered.

"We shall, I hope, be of service to one another," he responded.

There was another silence. Then Privet added:

"What I tell you, of course, is for the moment between ourselves."

Again he relapsed into silence.

His white, intelligent, ruthless face gave me no clue to his thoughts. But his silences were significant. He did

not know yet what to make of me and was therefore uncertain how to handle the situation.

"May I ask when you are going to take over?" I said at last.

"In a day or two. It is not yet finally settled."

He turned his face towards me with a sudden jerk.

"You came up the line with the British journalists?" he said.

"I did."

"You left them behind at Vitry?"

"I did."

"You wanted to see the Prime Minister?"

"That is so."

"Your mission to the Prime Minister had nothing to do with the journalists, I take it?"

"Not exactly."

"You had other business with him?"

He looked me very squarely in the face.

"You are not only British liaison officer between the British Embassy and the Ministry?" he continued.

"That is my official position."

"But you have other relations? With the *Deuxième Bureau*, for example?"

I assumed an air of candour.

"That is so, Monsieur Privet. In point of fact, I came to Vitry le François with what I understood to be an urgent communication to the Prime Minister from the head of the *Deuxième Bureau*."

"General Réhmy?" he said.

I nodded.

"You know him well?"

"I have only met him twice."

"And he asked you to convey a message to the Prime Minister?"

I hesitated.

"I am in the confidence of General Réhmy, I can assure you," Privet continued.

"The message which I was to deliver to the Prime Minister," I said, "was a written one."

"And you do not know the purport of the message?"

"It was in a sealed envelope."

"Forgive me, but that does not really answer my question."

"No, Monsieur Privet. I do not know what was contained in the message."

He had seen the message, I felt sure. Otherwise there was no way of accounting for his presence and for the fact that I had been locked up for an hour. But I had not signed my record of the interview between Privet, Madame Bertrand and Marshal Villebois. There was accordingly nothing on paper to identify me personally as the author. Blank ignorance must be my cue. Privet must be convinced that I was in no way dangerous.

I had not, I remembered, given myself away to Grosjean. To him I had merely said that I was the bearer of a written message which I had been instructed to hand personally to the Prime Minister.

"I will tell you exactly what happened," I continued. "General Réhmy knew I was going up with the journalists to Vitry le François. His department, as you know, deals, among other things, with the arrangements made for journalists. That, of course, is how I first came into contact with General Réhmy. Things, you understand, have not been working very smoothly so far as the English journalists are concerned, so I thought it best, as soon as I took on this job, to go straight to the fountain head. It is always better, I think, to deal direct with the heads of departments if one can. You know, sir, what journalists are like. To them news is everything, and they haven't been getting much of it lately. It was in the hope of making things easier for them that I went to General Réhmy, and it was on his suggestion that I accompanied the journalists to-day."

"And then?"

"He asked me, since I was going to Vitry, to be good enough to take an envelope to the Prime Minister. He said it was important."

"And did you hand over the envelope?"

"I handed it to the Prime Minister's Chef de Cabinet," I said, "but at the same time I felt I ought to see the Prime Minister just to explain matters."

"To explain what?" said Privet sharply.

"How it was that I came to be carrying the message. General Réhmy had told me that Monsieur Clementin would want to be well assured of my bonafides."

"So you felt it necessary to follow him to this place?"

"Precisely. But, as you know, I have not yet seen him."

"No. You have not yet seen him."

This seemed a good moment to take the offensive.

"And I have been kept waiting an hour," I added.

"The Prime Minister, as I have said, is a busy man," repeated Privet.

"I don't complain of that sir, but it seems strange that I should have been kept waiting in a locked room."

I stared very straight at him as I spoke. He hesitated for a fraction of a second.

"There must be some mistake," he said at last. "I will make inquiries and see that a suitable apology is made."

He rose to his feet.

"Well," he said, "I must be going. You will not now have long to wait, I am sure."

He paused.

"Will you, Monsieur Orford, do me the honour of lunching with me soon?"

"I shall be delighted," I said, also on my feet.

Waves of relief were bursting over me. I had survived the interview with credit. I had, in fact, done pretty



"You have no right to those papers," I retorted. "They are addressed to the Prime Minister, not to you. I demand their return."

He looked at me a moment. Then, very deliberately, he folded the sheets and thrust them back into his pocket.

"Here is your engagement book, Mr. Orford. I apologise for my little stratagem. But I had to be sure whether you were quite as innocent as you professed to be. I never make the mistake of believing an Englishman to be as stupid as he looks."

He shook his head. A mournful note crept into his voice.

"You English," he sighed. "You are so different from us. Ours is a strange alliance. Our enemies say it is oil and water. Sometimes I am almost persuaded that they are right. You do not understand our French politics, Mr. Orford. Not even the Englishmen who have passed all their lives in our country can hope to do that. There are wheels within wheels—permutations and combinations which they can never hope to unravel."

He paused.

"But at least," he continued, "you understand our politics well enough to realise that by revealing what you know of my relations with Madame Bertrand and Marshal Villebois you might very possibly ruin my credit with Monsieur Clementin just as the time when I need it most."

I looked at him steadily.

"So what?" I said.

He did not answer immediately, but looked thoughtfully at the sheets in his hand.

"This, I take it, is the only copy?" he said.

My heart jumped at his words.

"Yes."

The lie was prompt. It was obviously unnecessary to let Privet know that another copy, Granby's copy, was

by now in London in the hands of the British Prime Minister.

"This, in fact, is the only record in existence of the interview at the Croix Catalan."

"That is so."

"But you could always write another, could you not, Mr. Orford? That is what you are thinking?"

"It would, of course, be possible."

I stood apparently at ease, but I did not like the look of him. I decided that he had cold eyes and a cruel mouth.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Orford," he said slowly, "that you will never have the opportunity."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"My dear, sir," I protested, "you can't keep me deprived indefinitely of pen, pencil, and paper."

"No, I can't do that."

"Nor, presumably, can you arrange to have me assassinated on the doorstep."

"No, Monsieur. Nothing so melodramatic or ineffective. You will be brought before a court martial Mr. Orford, and charged as a spy. You are far up in the forward zone, within a mile or two of the fighting line, and *you are in civilian dress*."

"I was brought here in a staff car," I began.

"Indeed," he said. "And how will you prove it?"

"The officer . . ."

"The officer who brought you has already returned to Vitry le François and the driver with him."

"The court will order them back as a result of my statement."

Privet shook his head.

"The court before which you will appear will do no such thing," he answered, "not when my witnesses have been heard."

"But there is Monsieur Clementin," I said. "I shall demand to see him."

"Monsieur Clementin is still at Vitry le François—a fact which will make it all the more difficult for you to explain how you come to be here."

"My credentials."

"You have no credentials. My servants will see to that."

I forced a gallant smile.

"You seem to have thought of everything, Monsieur."

"Everything."

"But you are playing a dangerous game."

"Thank you, Mr. Orford. You admire my courage."

He reached out his hand, as he spoke, for the engagement book which he had dropped on the table, but paused suddenly in the act of retrieving it. A low, menacing sound had crept into the room and the hanging crystals on the chandelier above our heads tinkled softly. The noise grew in volume. It swelled suddenly into a dreadful roar.

Privet stood with the engagement book in his hand. He had gone white as a sheet. His eyes were staring and the pupils dilated. The muscles on his neck were wrinkled and across his forehead ran tiny furrows. Suddenly he threw out his arms and flung himself to the ground.

I stared at him in amazement. I had never seen so complete an exhibition of abrupt, overwhelming terror.

Then I realised that I was standing too near the open window for comfort. This was going to be one of those raids I had heard so much about. The Hun was dive-bombing above the château.

I moved quickly from the window.

As I did so, there came a final roar, a screaming and whistling, and then an explosion which shook the walls. Plaster flaked from the ceiling, and a tornado seemed to be loose in the room. Then the noise faded out quickly.

I had instinctively covered my face with my hands.

When I looked about again, Privet was sitting up on the floor. He sprang to his feet and moved quickly to the door. I darted forward instinctively to haul him back, but, before I could reach him, he had passed from the room.

The door slammed violently behind him and the key was turned in the lock.

CHAPTER VIII

COURT MARTIAL

I stood a moment staring at the painted panels. Then I walked slowly back to the window, dragged up one of the chairs, sat down and, staring out between the bars, tried to think.

Not that there was anything much to think about. I was to be court martialled, and I should almost certainly be shot. It was quite a simple situation.

I knew full well how ruthless the French could be in war-time. The men who tried me would have had their orders. Either they would shoot me to please Privet, who was a power in the land. Or, as good patriots, they would accept the evidence and hasten to rid the world of a suspected enemy of France.

The noise of battle outside ebbed and flowed. Once the château was heavily shaken by a dull explosion not far away. But though the battle was so close to me, it seemed somehow remote, something of which I was not emotionally aware. What is a battle more or less to a man whose days in any case are numbered?

I rose from my chair, intending to beat upon the door and summon Privet if I could. Half-way across the room I trod on something, and, looking down, perceived that it was Privet's engagement book.

He had meant to secure it just as the German dive-bomber had begun to do its stuff, but, in the extremity of his terror, had forgotten all about it. I bent down and slipped it into the side pocket of my coat.

Then I fell upon the door and kicked it heartily.

It suddenly opened to disclose a French orderly in an ill-fitting suit of khaki and with one of those strange

forage caps on his head which look like a child's drawing of a bishop's mitre. In his hands was the lid of a wooden crate, on which stood a plate of soup, a hunk of army bread, and a small bottle of red wine. Behind him stood two *poilus* with fixed bayonets and steel helmets.

"Your supper, prisoner," said one of them.

The orderly entered the room and set down the lid of the crate on the floor.

"I wish to speak to Monsieur Vespasien Privet," I said. "It is very urgent."

"That is impossible," said the orderly.

"I insist."

"Monsieur Privet left in his car twenty minutes ago."

"Then I must speak to him on the telephone."

"That, too, is impossible. He is on his way to Paris."

"Then I will telephone to Paris."

"Quite unnecessary," said the orderly. "Monsieur Privet has left a written statement. It will be considered by the court martial, with anything you may have to say in your defence."

"But look here," I protested.

"Enough," said the orderly, and followed the two *poilus* from the room.

I sat down to supper. The wine was the rough red *pinot* issued to the French troops, harsh but seemingly sound. The soup was of the nature of a thin stew. The bread was stale.

I began to rehearse what I should say to the court martial and, when I had finished eating, sat back in the chair and closed my eyes in an endeavour to compose my mind to the task.

All was now quiet on the battle front. In the absence of other noises, my attention was roused by a soft thud, followed by a rustle. It came from the direction of the window beside which I was sitting. I opened my eyes, thinking for one happy moment that someone outside was trying to attract my attention.

On the sill stood or rather lay a pigeon. I rose from my chair. As I did so, a black form landed upon the ledge. A frightened sound burst from the pigeon, a sort of strangled coo. I thrust my hand through the bars. A lean cat had seized the bird in its front paws. I cuffed the animal soundly and it released the pigeon with an angry scream.

The bird trembled between my fingers as I drew it into the room, but it made no effort to escape. Its feathers had been ruffled, but, as far as I could tell, it had suffered no serious injury. Indeed, as I examined the bird, it began to flap its wings.

Attached to its left leg was a small metal cylinder. I turned the cylinder towards the light and looked at it more closely. Stamped on the metal in very small letters and numerals I could just read the inscription: PAR.6772.

It was the number of the pigeon lost which I had seen earlier in the day at Vitry le François.

I detached the cylinder and forced it open. There was a tiny slip of semi-transparent paper inside it which I did not disturb, for there was still room for another message.

The bird was now becoming restive. Evidently it had taken shelter or fallen on the ledge, temporarily stunned by the shell-fire or bombing.

I tore a sheet of paper from my engagement book and wrote in French:

"Telephone immediately General Réhmy Chef Deuxième Bureau Orford at Divisional Headquarters hundred kilometres North-west Vitry le François accused of espionage. Requires immediate assistance."

Underneath the message I wrote *"Very Urgent. Priority."*

I rolled up the paper, pushed it into the cylinder, and clipped the cylinder itself to the bird's leg. Then I approached the window and looked out. The cat

was not to be seen. Outside was the derelict garden of the château, pocked with shell or bomb craters.

I pushed the bird between the bars and released it gently. It stood a moment on my hand, its little pink claws clutching at the base of my fingers. I thought it was going to refuse to fly away, but it shook its wings and in a second was in the air. I saw it wheel upwards and then disappear, travelling fast towards the south.

I went back to my chair. Would my message get through? And would its recipient have the sense to act at once? I knew nothing about the habits of homing pigeons or of the persons who looked after them. Speculation, therefore, was idle.

Two hours later, when the dusk had deepened almost to night outside, the door was once more thrust open. It admitted a file of men with rifles and bayonets in charge of a non-commissioned officer. I fell in between them and was marched off. We went down a corridor, turned twice to the right, and passed through another door.

I found myself standing immediately in front of a table, behind which sat three French officers. The man in the middle wore the five stripes of a colonel. He was flanked by a major and a captain.

"Prisoner, halt."

I halted.

"Your name?"

"I protest, Messieurs. This procedure is entirely irregular. I demand . . ."

The colonel raised his head and looked at me. He had a lean, clean-shaven face. There were three rows of ribbon on his left breast, including the British Military Cross.

"I demand," I finished, "to speak with the officer commanding this division."

"Your protest is noted," said the colonel, "but your demand is refused and the court is now open. You are charged under Chapter 14, Article 421, Sub-section B of

the *Code Militaire* with being, as a civilian, in an army zone without a permit. Your name?"

"John Orford, British subject, at present on a mission to His Excellency Monsieur Clementin, Prime Minister of France."

"How do you come to be here?"

"I was brought here by a French officer in a staff car."

"For what purpose?"

"To carry out my mission and to see Monsieur Clementin."

"Monsieur Clementin is not within a hundred kilometres of this place."

"Then I was misinformed."

"By whom?"

"By a gentleman at Vitry le François."

I hesitated to mention Grosjean. My story had somehow to be credible. The colonel looked me up and down.

"In fact," he said, "you have been the victim of a fantastic conspiracy, to which the Prime Minister's confidential secretary is a party. You see, Monsieur, we have been informed in advance of the preposterous nature of your defence. We have Monsieur Privet's signed deposition. You were challenged and picked up on the road as he was passing in his car and you made to him a series of absurd statements and claims. Do not repeat them here. Our time is short."

I shall never know whether the colonel was an honest man. I was finding it increasingly difficult as the days went by to distinguish, in the tragedy to which France was moving, between honest error and deliberate bad faith. The colonel had, in any case, made up his mind. Privet had warned him in advance against my story, and I should be losing my breath in trying to convince him that Privet was not to be trusted.

Nevertheless, I continued to argue my case for over

an hour. I do not propose to describe the scene in detail. Believe it or not, most of the time was spent by the court, not in considering the evidence, but in discussing points of military law, one of my judges who knew something of the relevant procedure complaining of certain irregularities to which he evidently attached considerably more importance than the possibility of condemning an innocent man to death.

In due course the President declared:

"The court will now consider its verdict."

I was taken from the room and ordered to wait in the passage outside. But not for long. Within five minutes I was standing again in front of my judges. All three of them were on their feet. The colonel read from a paper which he held in his hand:

"Accused, you have been found guilty. The sentence of the court is death. Sentence will be carried out at dawn. Provost-Marshal, take away your prisoner."

I spent the next few hours, not in the room where I had hitherto been confined, but in one of the cellars of the château. It was empty except for three or four large barrels—*barriques*, as the French call them—long since emptied of their contents. I was put there for greater safety, against the heavy bombing which was expected. It did not even strike me as odd that my gaolers should be so anxious to keep me alive in order that I might be shot at dawn. I had become too well aware that I was living in a mad world to find its minor insanities at all remarkable. After all, it is the duty of warders in a sane English community at peace to deliver their prisoners safe and sound to the hangman.

The château was attacked three times in the course of the night, and a great deal of it, to judge by the noise and tremor which penetrated to my place of confinement among its foundations, seemed to have fallen down.

I sat on the dirty floor, my back against one of the empty barrels, and tried to compose myself for death.

I did not find it an easy thing to do. I felt no resignation, no inclination to thoughts of heaven—only bitter rage at the prospect of quitting a world in which, for all its futility, I intensely desired to remain—at least until I had seen what was to come of the great adventure upon which all men of goodwill were now embarked of settling accounts, once for all, with Hitler and his kind.

I remember yielding at one bad moment to an attack of craven panic. It seemed a fearful thing to die. Then I remembered Privet cowering from death during the first German raid on the château. I remembered, too, that men were dying all about me and hot shame drove away my terror, though somehow it seemed more dreadful to be killed, as it were inescapably and by appointment, a mere civilian, under a grotesque parody of the forms of law, than to take one's chance in battle or to face the common risks of the non-combatant in a total war.

These and other thoughts went through my mind, mingled with recollections of childhood and of odd moments in my past when I had been supremely happy: pictures of Provence, lovely land of olives, sunshine, dusty houses with yellow tiles, song, and the old Horatian view of life. I saw the great arches of the Pont du Gard suspended from the high bluffs clothed in dwarf oak and rosemary where nightingales sing and young owls hoot to each other in the dark, the small fields and rivers of England, the wider rivers and fields of France, St. James's Street on a fine morning, Montparnasse upon an evening in Spring.

Perhaps I fell into a troubled doze. I cannot be sure.

A hand was shaking my shoulder and a voice was saying:

"It is time now. Courage."

A non-commissioned officer, his bristly chin, smeared with the dust with which everything was covered and which blew about in a light cloud after every fresh

explosion, was leaning over me. I stumbled to my feet and nearly fell.

"Hold the bastard up, Jean," said the non-commissioned officer to another of the same kind who had followed him into the cellar. "He can't even face it standing."

I glanced at him, now thoroughly awake.

"Can't you see?" I said angrily. "My leg has gone to sleep."

"Put your hands behind your back," said the man gruffly.

I did so. A strap was passed across my wrists and drawn tight. I moved stiffly towards the exit of the cellar, trying to keep in step with my escort on either side of me. We emerged through a large hole, in the midst of which were the broken pieces of the door through which I had been taken a few hours before, and so into the courtyard of the château. It was pitted with bomb craters and strewn with bricks and tiles. The château itself looked as though a giant had hit it once or twice with a large mallet. The room where I had been confined while awaiting Privet had disappeared.

"You ought to have left me there," I said bitterly. "It would have saved you a lot of trouble."

My escort said nothing, but continued to march across the courtyard. We picked our way through heaps of rubble, till I found myself standing in front of a stucco-faced wall formerly part, I think, of the stables. A dozen paces away eight *poilus* stood in line, their rifles in their hands. On the right of them was a young infantry lieutenant.

"Halt," came the voice of the non-commissioned officer in charge.

I halted.

"Right turn."

I turned. The men on either side of me moved briskly away.

I was alone.

Beyond the eight men whom I was now facing the country fell away, green and yellow and brown in the light of dawn, to the far horizon.

"Firing squad, take aim."

The voice of the young lieutenant could only just be heard above the crash of a nearby explosion, but the rifles that went simultaneously to the eight shoulders were as steady as rocks. They were pointed at my breast.

I felt suddenly the bitter mockery of my position. Here was death striking at these men from the skies. Yet they must quietly go about their business of killing *me*.

The face of the young lieutenant was white and resolute. I drew a deep breath and shut my eyes.

From somewhere a voice was shouting "Halt."

I opened my eyes.

A figure was running and stumbling over the heaps of rubble towards the firing-party. It was small and wiry, wearing British battle-dress, with a British tin hat set rakishly upon its head and a British gas-mask at the alert position bumping on its chest. It passed between me and the levelled rifles.

Beneath the tin hat, tense and smiling in the grey light, I saw the face of Granby.

CHAPTER IX

BLITZKRIEG

He thrust an open sheet of paper beneath the face of the young lieutenant.

"Read that, Lieutenant" I heard him say, "and kindly note the signature."

The lieutenant took the paper and began to read. I stood very still. The rifles were still levelled at my breast and might, if I moved, go off. I threw out my chest and took a deep breath. I had not cut such a bad figure after all. Here some wandering dust got into my nostrils and I sneezed violently.

"It appears to be in order, *mon Colonel*," the lieutenant was saying.

"It is certainly in order," answered Granby, "unless you happen to have changed your Commander-in-Chief yet again in the night."

The lieutenant smiled grimly.

"No," he said. "The name of General Weygand at the foot of an order is still good."

He folded the paper.

"I must keep this," he added.

He ordered the squad to lower their rifles. Then he looked at me.

"Monsieur," he said, "my felicitations. And no ill-feeling, I trust."

"None whatever," I responded with dignity.

The young man turned to Granby and saluted. He gave another order, and the firing squad marched away beside him as Granby came towards me.

"Not a bad show, laddie," he said.

I felt his hands at my wrists and heard his voice murmuring behind my back:

*"He nothing common did nor mean
Upon that memorable scene."*

A moment later I was free.

"I can only infer that I looked considerably braver than I felt," I responded.

"It comes a bit hard at first," said Granby cheerfully. "But one improves with practice. Next time you'll face it feeling like a bridegroom and singing the Yeoman's Wedding."

He looked quickly round the courtyard.

"And now," he added, "we had better be getting back before the Hun starts popping off again."

I fell into step beside him. We crossed the courtyard and turned to the left. A hundred yards away stood a British staff car, camouflaged and with a driver at the wheel.

"There is a thermos with hot coffee in the car," Granby was saying, and then suddenly, sharply:

"Down, John, flat."

I flung myself forward beside him and behind about two feet of rubble. A high screaming sound rent the air, and I saw a plane, mottled like the car, falling like a plummet from the sky. It flattened out not a couple of hundred feet up and perhaps three hundred yards away. Two small black objects were loosed from it. The whistling scream of their descent mingled with the roar of the plane's engines as it zoomed up. Then came a flash and a sound louder than anything else, so loud that I thought my eardrums would split.

I think I was knocked out for a moment.

"Hell," Granby was saying when I sat up again.

He was looking at the car, or rather where the car had last been seen and where there was nothing now but a large hole from which black smoke was pouring.

I realised that I had seen a German dive-bomber in action.

"Come on," Granby said.

I rose shakily to my feet and followed him at a run towards a cluster of houses a few hundred yards away.

"There's a lorry park over there," he panted as he loped along. "We may be able to get transport."

We reached the park, turned the corner of a house, and stopped dead.

Ten yards away stood a large tank.

Hardly had I set eyes upon this unwelcome apparition—for tank spelled "Boche" to me in capital letters—than my attention was drawn again to heaven. For in the sky, small but growing rapidly larger, eleven machines were flying in a straight line. Suddenly they fell towards us, all together, as though jerked by a string. The rising sun glittered a moment on their wings. Half a dozen puffs of smoke appeared to right and left of them. Then they suddenly flattened out of what seemed to me a vertical dive, all but two, which continued their headlong course and crashed among the bombs which the others had let fall. The earth shook and quivered. Something, a shell or a bomb, I don't know which, struck the house twenty yards away next to which the tank was standing. The wall collapsed in a shower of bricks and dust, which rattled down on the tank—a French tank, as I now perceived.

I stood motionless.

"Come on," shouted Granby again.

I began to run once more. Granby's quick eye had seen what I had failed to notice. Two men were lying beneath the heap of bricks which a moment before had formed the wall of a house, their heads twisted in death under their tin hats.

They had evidently been running to their tank when the bombs had fallen.

"In with you," shouted Granby.

I scrambled over the caterpillar track of the tank and followed Granby through a small hole in the roof. He brought the lid down on the hole with a clang.

"Ever driven a tank?" he demanded.

"Of course not."

"Then you'll have to pull something and see what happens," he responded.

His hand was urgent on my shoulder, jamming me into a little padded seat. There were some levers to my right hand. A slit in front gave me a glimpse, hardly more, of the street of the town, of the houses standing on either side and of the tower of a church just visible beyond a huddle of roofs on the right.

The street was empty, littered with glass and tiles, but the houses did not appear to be badly damaged. Advertisements of Dubonnet, Quinina and Amer Picon enlivened the walls of a dusty little *bistro* a short way up on the left-hand side, in front of which was an iron table and two chairs, one of them overturned.

My foot sought and found the clutch, as Granby, leaning over my shoulder, pulled a knob on my left and started the engine. With my right hand I rammed home what I took to be the gear lever.

With a rattle and a roar we started off and rumbled up the village street. Granby was now standing at my side and my head was level with his waist. I could see the medal ribbons, including the D.S.O., on his chest. His hands were upon the breech of a small quick-firing gun.

"Turn her round," he shouted as we rattled along.

He pointed to a lever.

"That controls the tracks, I think," he added.

I pushed it gingerly.

We spun to the right, for I had thrown the right-hand track out of gear. This brought us straddling across the street and, before I knew what had happened, there came a terrific crash as the nose of the tank hit

the window of a small grocery shop. I thrust out the clutch and we halted, the engine roaring behind me.

"Back her down," shouted Granby.

I jammed in the gear lever to what I thought was reverse, letting in the clutch. We shot backwards. In the middle of the street I was pushing the lever again, intending to swing the tank right round, when Granby called out:

"Full speed ahead."

I thrust the lever into the notch opposite that for reverse. The tank lurched forward.

I could now see through the visor, and what I saw was not encouraging. Round the corner at the top of the street a German light tank had appeared. The black cross on its body was clearly visible. As I caught sight of it, a machine-gun sparked and rattled from the turret. Bullets pattered upon the armour which shielded us. At the same instant a loud clang almost deafened my right ear. Granby was firing the gun. The range was perhaps sixty yards. There came a flash of light, for the shell was a tracer, and I saw it strike home at the base of the German turret. For an instant nothing happened except that the machine-gun stopped spitting. Then a blue flame began to flicker at the base of the turret. It spread, like burning brandy spreads when you pour it over a Christmas pudding. The tank continued to rumble steadily towards us, a flaming mass, until it swerved suddenly and crashed into a house ten yards away.

"Good shot," I yelled, but my voice was drowned as Granby's gun went off again.

This time he was shooting at an armoured vehicle, a monster on caterpillar wheels which had come up immediately behind the German tank. He hit one of the wheels, which disintegrated into shining slips and slivers of metal. The vehicle lurched and came to a stop. Granby put another shell into it, and it suddenly

burst into flames, sending up a huge column of thick black smoke.

"Petrol carrier," said Granby.

"Grand work," I shouted.

"Time to go," he shouted back.

Somchow I contrived to straighten our tank, and we began to make off down the village street. Granby's back was now towards me, for he had swung the turret round to face the enemy. The noise inside the machine was indescribable. It was for that reason, I suppose, that the first intimation I had that we ourselves were being attacked was when I saw a black object fall perhaps ten yards away in front of me. The subsequent explosion overwhelmed all other sounds. I felt the machine rock violently. I thrust my foot on the clutch. A hideous stench hit my nostrils and my head whirled. Lights, green, blue, and violet, which were, it seemed to me, at the same time full of sound, blinded me and there was a salty taste in my mouth.

The tank lurched. More noises . . . roaring, screeching, throbbing behind me. Then silence.

My next recollection is of a rough sleeve pressed against my mouth and nose. Granby was leaning over me, his hand on the trigger of the light machine-gun which formed the secondary armament of our tank and which, it appeared, was normally fired by the driver. That duty Granby was now performing. I could hear the rattle of the gun, but could see nothing. The stench I identified as petrol, the fumes of which caused me to feel violently sick. The rattle ceased.

Granby pulled himself back from across my knees.

Through the visor I could see that we had been slewed round again, presumably by the explosion of the bomb. Then I saw what Granby had been shooting at. Beyond the flaming vehicles two motor-cycle combinations were visible. One of them was not ten yards away from us. It was lying on its side, the wheel of the sidecar still

spinning and its engine chugging heartily. Its crew was sprawling across it. The other combination was behind the first, some distance off. It had mounted the pavement. For a moment I thought it was still in action, and then I saw that the driver had fallen across the handlebars, while his companion in the sidecar was evidently in no better case, for I saw an arm with a limp hand at the end of it hanging over the edge.

"Come on," said Granby in my ear. "It's our only chance. We daren't try restarting the tank. It will blow up, with all this petrol about."

He was tugging at the lid covering the manhole.

"Jammed," he said.

"Try this."

I handed him up a large spanner, one of several emergency tools tucked in a pocket beside my seat. All was now very quiet. The tapping of the spanner was the only sound.

Till then there had been no time for fear. You can't drive a tank, watch your companion do battle, and at the same time feel even slightly nervous. But, as Granby struggled with the recalcitrant cover of the manhole which had jammed, I experienced some, perhaps all, the sensations which the proverbial rat is said to feel when caught in a trap. Barring the uncertain light that trickled through the tank visor, we were in a suffocating, fume-laden darkness, and that petrol vapour might ignite at any moment.

Hours afterwards, as it seemed—minutes actually—Granby grunted and a sword of light, the most blessed thing I have even seen or ever shall see, pierced the murk.

"Out we go!"

Granby was already scrambling up. I followed and slipped over the caterpillar track, noticing as I did so that several of its links were broken. I found my feet on the roadway and staggered after Granby towards the motor-cyclists. We had, perhaps, some fifty yards

to go, and it seemed the longest distance I had ever covered.

I struggled to the sidecar and levered myself up, my head swimming, the village rocking and seeming to tilt sideways.

"Stick it, laddie," said Granby, "and give me a hand."

I took hold with Granby of the body of the motor-cyclist driver, a burly Hun with only half a face where Granby's machine-gun bullets had found their mark. He had fallen across the handlebars of the machine and, in doing so, had switched off the engine. We dropped him into the roadway.

Getting his mate out of the sidecar was worse, for he was hunched up over the butt of his tommy gun, which fired through a hole in a little shield which had provided him with cover just not adequate. One of Granby's bullets had hit the top of his steel helmet, ploughing a furrow through it which had touched the skull beneath. He was still alive when we dragged him from the motor-cycle, breathing in a short, hoarse way, like a steam-engine moving up an incline with a heavy load. We got him out of the sidecar and laid him on the ground.

A moment later Granby was in the saddle.

"On board," he said, kicking at the starter.

The engine burst into life as I clambered into the sidecar. A second later we were rocketing down the village street.

Fifty yards brought us to the hole made by the bomb which had only just missed the tank. Granby stopped the engine and we manhandled the combination round the edge of the crater.

All this time I was wondering how many more of the enemy would be swarming after us, but our luck held. None appeared. Granby clambered again into the saddle. Before starting up, however, he looked at me.

"Get that tin hat," he said, pointing to a French helmet lying in the road.

I picked it up, crammed it on my head, got back into the sidecar, and we started off again.

The engine was a good one, and we were making fifty miles an hour, the road, by a kind dispensation of Providence, being empty. The rush of air did much to revive me, though I was sick twice over the edge of the sidecar. The road took a bend. Round the corner stood an estaminet built at a small cross-roads. Granby pulled up.

"Got a white flag, John?"

There was a broad grin on his mouth.

"Of course not," I said.

"Get a tablecloth—anything. Look slippery."

I clambered out of the sidecar. The door of the estaminet was hanging on one hinge. I thrust past it and entered the ground-floor room littered with broken glasses and bottles. In a far corner a steep flight of stairs led to the upper regions. I ran up, pushed open a door, and found myself in a bedroom. The bedclothes were lying in disorder. Evidently the inhabitants had fled in haste. I picked up a pillow, tore off the case, and staggered with it down the stairs. My eye caught sight of some unbroken bottles beneath the counter of the estaminet as I passed. I snatched up one of them at random and pushed through the front door. Granby had wedged the tommy gun in the sidecar so that it pointed vertically upwards.

"Good lad," he said as I clambered aboard for the third time.

I tied the pillow-case to the tommy gun.

The improvised flag flared out past my head. The air rushed past my ears. Then I realised that I was grasping a bottle of brandy—Otard 3 Star.

"What's that you've got?"

There was a note of hope in Granby's voice.

Our breakfast," I said.

Corkserew in my left-hand trouser pocket," he answered briefly.

I extracted from the place in question a formidable combination knife, one of those instruments which delight small boys and which contain all sorts of strange gadgets, including a mysterious hook which, I have been told, was originally made for the purpose of pulling pebbles out of the hooves of horses. Beneath it was a small corkserew.

The fiery spirit worked wonders, especially upon Granby, for his explanations when we met three French light tanks were superb. Their commander not only gave us a chit to the nearest army headquarters some ten miles away but embraced us both and called us heroes. We added to his joy by telling him that we thought the Germans were about to attack in force. Apparently he asked for nothing better, for there was no defeatism here. He called gaily to his two companions, and they roared and lurched away into the bright morning air, heading straight for the Hun.

Arrived at the local army headquarters, Granby went straight to the telephone, leaving me to account for our presence to two staff officers hunched over a small wooden table in the Mairie of Bar-le-Duc. They were not, however, interested in our adventures. Everyone had a tale to tell and heroes were three a penny. They wanted to know where it might be possible to find or not to find the enemy, though one of the officers was kind enough to express concern at the fact that we were not in uniform. I should do well, he said, not to be taken prisoner.

Granby joined me at the end of a quarter of an hour. "There are no cars available," he said. "We therefore go to Paris on our motor-bike."

We started at once. I need not describe the journey in detail. We were stopped times without number.

spite or because of our white flag, but no one fired upon us. Once outside the army zone, we found the roads were entirely deserted and we made good speed.

Granby explained how he had been able to come so promptly to my rescue. He had happened to be with General Réhmy when my message had come through by telephone from the pigeon-post unit, to which the bird had safely returned. Granby had gone personally to General Weygand himself.

Needless to say, I gave Granby a full account of my interview with Privet.

We crossed the Marne at Meaux and entered Paris by Belleville and the Quartier des Lilas. Here we were stopped by sentries just as I was telling Granby how Privet had fallen to the floor in a panic and forgotten to retrieve his engagement book.

"What did he do with it?" he asked as we dismounted from the motor-cycle and began to walk towards the *gardes mobiles* who held the barrier.

"He dropped it," I answered, "and I picked it up. It is in my pocket now. I haven't yet had time to read it."

Granby produced his chit from the French army headquarters and a small crowd began to collect, which rapidly grew in numbers. It consisted for the most part of workmen from the local *bistro*, who were taking their midday meal preparatory to resuming their labours on some nearby fortifications.

"The brave English! Well done, the Allies! Long live the United Powers!"

One little man with a weeping moustache clapped me on the back and stood me a brimming glass of Dubonnet, which, added to the brandy which I had drunk, made me feel lightheaded.

The commander of the section of the *gardes mobiles* came up.

"I am to take the motor-cycle and sidecar," he said.
"They are to be exhibited as a trophy."

The crowd cheered again and, amidst tremendous enthusiasm, a taxi was summoned. We climbed into it. The driver let in the clutch and we sped away.

"Better take a look at that engagement book, laddie," said Granby as I lolled back at ease upon the padded cushions.

I put my hand into my pocket. I fumbled once and then again.

But the pocket was empty.

CHAPTER X

FRONT PAGE

"We must go back," I said. "I have had my pocket picked."

I made to speak to the driver.

"It's no use going back," protested Granby, "unless you know which of that noisy crowd took your wallet."

"Of course I don't," I said irritably.

"What was in Privet's engagement book?"

"I don't know. I had other things to think about."

"Of course," said Granby soothingly. "You had no time for miscellaneous reflection. I was once put up against a wall myself, and, as Dr. Johnson says: 'It concentrates the mind quite remarkably when one is going to be hanged.'"

"Well," I replied, "I don't suppose the book contained anything very much—his luncheon engagements, perhaps, and the telephone numbers of his mistresses."

"Which may be very important," said Granby. "Aspasia plays her part these days. We will tell Réhmy about it."

The taxi stopped at the Ministry of War in the Rue St. Dominique. We entered a vestibule hung with trophies of arms and, a moment later, found ourselves in the presence of General Richard, Governor of Paris. He was an excitable little man from Gascony. Together we gave him an account of our adventures, suppressing all mention of Privet and his behaviour, and, of course, all reference to the court martial.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when we reached General Réhmy's office, and to him, with slight prompting from Granby, I told our tale in full.

"And now," I concluded, "what is the next move? I can scarcely go back to the Ministry, where Privet is likely to take command at any moment."

"He hasn't taken over yet," replied General Réhmy slowly, "and I somehow fancy that, when he does, he will meet you with the utmost cordiality. I think he will, as you say in England, let the sleeping dog lie down. Meantime we must build up your reputation as a warrior. It will strengthen your position. You must give your battle story to the Press."

I made to protest, but Granby intervened.

"No ill-timed modesty," he said. "You are going to step straight into the limelight. It's your job out here to look after the Press, and you can provide them now with the best story they have had for months."

"I don't see how it will improve matters to blow our trumpet before all and sundry."

"Your trumpet, old boy. Not mine. I'm fading out—just a British liaison officer whom you happened to run into when the fun started. You even forgot to ask for my name, so intent you were upon destroying the Boche. That is the sort of human touch which pleases the newshounds."

"Privet," said General Réhmy, "will think twice about molesting the brave Englishman who stole a tank."

General Réhmy was smiling, but I suddenly noticed how tired he seemed to be. There was resolution in his looks, but not much hope.

"He cannot do anything against you openly while you are in the public eye, and I don't think he will resort to murder in the back streets, though, of course, he might. But we will take care of that."

"Then what exactly am I to do?" I asked.

"You must go back to your office and throw the weight. And in the English papers you will be front page."

"And the engagement book?"

"We will do our best to recover that," said Réhmy.

"It was a small book of green morocco?"

I added one or two details which Réhmy noted on a pad.

On my way to the Ministry, sharing a taxi with Granby, I asked what he intended to do himself.

"Back to London," he said. "And I shall return to Paris, I hope, with the Prime Minister."

"The Prime Minister?"

"He has had time to digest your famous record and will be able to warn Clementin. There is to be a meeting of the Supreme War Council within the next two days."

"Grosjean," I said abruptly, "is a bad hat."

Granby nodded.

"Has Clementin no one about him whom he can trust?"

Granby shrugged his shoulders.

"We are like men walking on a crust of earth above a volcano. It may hold or it may not. Some parts appear stronger than others. You cannot tell. But you have to go on walking."

"I just can't believe it. The French are not like that. They are a great people—full of high heart and courage. I have known them for twenty years."

"You have known the men who work in the fields and till the vines and keep the little *bistros*, who 'go to it' in the factories, who catch the fish off the Breton coast. You do not know the officials and the politicians and the financiers and the two hundred families or even the little tradesmen who have for years sent every centime they can scrape together out of the country and invested it in foreign bonds. Nor have you ever asked yourself why the most intelligent people in the world allow themselves to be swindled and exploited and misled by some of the greatest scoundrels unhung."

Granby stopped suddenly. So did the taxi. We had reached the Ministry.

For the next two days I was very definitely in the news—such news as could still be crowded into papers reduced to a single sheet except on one day a week. My office was crowded with callers of all kinds, from my little men with obscure academic qualifications, who had been encouraged by my predecessor to write tireless talks on "How the French Govern Madagascar," or "From Tonga to Togoland," to writers of the standing of André Maurois, anxious to tell the world what had come to be officially known as Britain's War Effort.

I saw nothing of Privet at the Ministry, but on the third morning received a telephone call from Madame Bertrand asking me to lunch next day at Neuilly.

I accepted.

Madame Bertrand, of course, would have heard all about my eavesdropping at the Croix Catalan and I was certainly far from eager to see her again. But I knew that Granby would expect me to go.

I arrived at her house, as bidden, about half-past twelve, to find that she and her guests were collected round a bathing pool in the garden. It was lined with blue tiles and, immediately before the war, had been the subject of admiring or ribald comment on the part of the French Press. The party was a large one, about twenty persons, including two or three young officers who were recovering from recent wounds, with their wives or fiancées. It was a fine hot day. Madame Bertrand met me on the lawn.

"How good of you to come! Now you must have bathe before lunch."

"But I have nothing to wear," I protested.

She pointed to some striped tents pitched near edge of the pool.

"You will find everything in there," she answered.

I entered one of the tents and in truth found everything necessary or unnecessary, from a bathing slip to silver-backed brushes and a nail file. I took off my clothes, put on the slip, and a moment later joined the young men and girls who were splashing about in the pool. It was, I admit, refreshing. So was the dry Martini handed to me by an aged butler as I sat in the sunshine in a flamboyant bathing wrap after my dip.

I was sipping it comfortably and chatting with a pretty girl about the imminent entry of Italy into the war when I saw him crossing the lawn. I had been sure in advance that Vespasien Privet would be there, but when I saw him advancing towards me I drained the Martini at a gulp. He was wearing a blue suit with a white stripe in it, rather more conspicuous than would have been worn in England. He did not appear to notice me at first, but walked round shaking hands affably with Madame Bertrand's various guests.

Then he came at me with both hands.

"The hero of the hour," he exclaimed. "I am very glad to meet you again, Mr. Orford."

It was difficult for me to remember in these surroundings that this man had threatened me with death, that he was making ready to betray France, and, incidentally, that I had seen him sprawling on the floor abject with terror. I found myself mechanically returning his handshake and grinning back at him with a smile as mirthless as his own.

My furious admiration of his self-possession gave place to an admiring fury at his insolence when I discovered, a little later, that my clothes in the bathing tent had been searched during my swim in the pool. I am oddly methodical about my clothes. I had hung them up as usual in a particular order, but, when I came to put them on again, the order had been changed. The coat, for example, was outside the waistcoat.

I recalled, now I came to think of it, that the clothes

in my wardrobe at the Hôtel Cosmopolitan had not that morning been in the order in which I had hung them up on my arrival.

I quitted the tent in a thoughtful mood and joined the others on the terrace, where I was at once engaged by Madame Bertrand.

"Now, Mr. Orford," she said, "you must tell us all about your unbelievable adventures. Not that you are likely to do so. It is the man who wants to be a hero that talks. The real fighter is dumb."

She fluttered towards the long table and made me sit on her left. Privet was on her right. She flattered and teased—extracting from me some sort of story for her guests. My mind went back incredulously to the last occasion when I had seen her, fingering the cross at her breast, mourning for the sins of France.

To my acute embarrassment one young wounded officer, his arm only just out of a sling, insisted on proposing my health when the champagne was poured out with the sweet. Privet touched glasses with me as the toast was drunk with acclamation.

The company showed signs of breaking up after the coffee. But I was not to be so easily released. I was waiting my chance to take leave of Madame Bertrand when Privet slipped his arm in the most natural way in the world into mine and took me along the terrace towards an alley of clipped box trees.

His manner changed as soon as we were beyond the terrace, but he still kept his arm in mine.

"Mr. Orford," he said grimly, "I did not expect to see you again in Paris."

I said nothing to that. He dropped my arm and stood facing me.

"You have come back something of a hero," he continued. "That was clever of you. You know that I will not venture to go in for young lion shooting, so to speak, in the full glare of the public eye."

"I have taken the measure of your courage, Monsieur," I said coldly.

His pallid face flushed. I could almost feel him wince. I had got him on the raw with a vengeance and, in that moment, I knew that, if he had tried to kill me once for policy, he would, if he should try again, kill me for pleasure.

"You have been fortunate, Mr. Orford," he said. "But fortune should never be tempted."

"Do you mean to threaten me?" I demanded.

"Of course I mean to threaten you. That is the object of this conversation. At the moment you have nothing to fear. If, however, you should be unwise enough to seek another interview with Monsieur Clementin or to cast doubt upon the good faith of Monsieur Grosjean, the consequences would be serious. I hope I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," I answered.

"There is just one other matter," he went on, pausing a moment by the side of a weather-beaten nymph on a stone plinth. "I have missed my pocket engagement book. Do you know anything about it?"

"Nothing whatever."

"My last recollection is that I had it in my hand during our last talk together, when, if you remember, I was asking you to luncheon."

"Very possibly. But I seem to recollect that you left the room rather hurriedly."

Again I could feel him wince. I was aware, though his face did not change, of the venom behind his cold eyes.

"The question is," he said, "did I leave it behind in the château?"

"If you did," I answered, "it is now well buried. There wasn't much left of the château when I came away."

"I hope you are right," he said slowly. "I shoul"

hate to think of it turning up in your hands or in the hands of any of your friends."

"I see here an implication," I said.

He smiled.

"That there are in my engagement book certain things, you mean, that I should not like you to see or the world to know about? Of course I admit it. I make no secret of the fact that, should you or your friend Colonel Granby obtain possession of it, I should be seriously embarrassed."

He looked at me keenly. I tried to feel like a small boy in an orchard who had never heard of apples.

Perhaps I succeeded, for he looked away towards the terrace.

"I see that our hostess is beckoning," he said. "Good afternoon, Mr. Orford. I shall hope to meet you again at the Ministry."

CHAPTER XI

PANTECHNICON

For a week I carried on at the Ministry. Nothing happened to me, but every hour brought news of what was happening in France and Flanders. I performed my official duties and slept every night at the Hôtel Cosmopolitan in the room next to Henry Cheriton, watching his face grow longer with each successive blow delivered by a seemingly invincible enemy.

News reached Paris on the 23rd that the Germans had entered Boulogne. The French *riposte* to this was immediate. It consisted in the dismissal by Clementin of fifteen Generals.

This was the high spot of the week, and my French colleagues broke all records for whispering and agitation. Even the stout-hearted Captain Hugon was for a moment shaken, though he rallied sufficiently to state with a kind of defiant firmness that, whatever happened, the French armies would hold fast.

When I reported this conviction to Cheriton, he pointed to the pile of Havas telegrams which were accumulating on my desk. They were messages which the French censorship had refused to permit the Agency to issue to the Press. Part of my official duties was to read them daily. The news which they contained was not good. Even worse was the fact that no publication of this news was allowed. The French authorities were determined to put a false good face on the situation, and there was a very marked difference between the warning bulletins issued by the War Office in London, the alarmingly accurate broadcasts of the enemy, who could afford to tell the truth at a moment when the facts were all in his favour, and the soothing assurances delivered

daily by the French military spokesmen to the journalists in Paris.

The French censorship was equally severe upon the disquieting messages which had begun to reach us concerning Italy, much of it from responsible American sources.

"There are still honest men in the Cabinet who hope to keep Italy out of the war," Cheriton explained. "Mussolini, moreover, has good friends in this country."

"They ought to be put away."

Cheriton lifted his eyebrows.

"Only wicked communists are put away. No French minister would dare to touch Rever or Chapeau. Rever expects Mussolini to be grateful for past favours. After all, he made the Duce a present of Abyssinia, gave him a footing in Spain, and helped him to destroy the League of Nations. Not single-handed, of course. Let us in fairness remember, before casting our stone, that there was once a Crystal Palace in London. I seem to remember a certain Sir David Doxy."

Cheriton smiled bitterly.

"Who always acted, of course, from the highest motives," he added.

Of the men mentioned by Cheriton, Chapeau, I reflected, had been thrown out of the French Cabinet by Clementin and Rever had discreetly retired from public view when war had become inevitable. But Cheriton maintained that these men were still at work behind the scenes. No wonder that France was sick and that the censorship was severe. The awful thought that France might be sick unto death crossed my mind, I remember, for the first time after that conversation and, do what I could, I was unable to drive it away.

It returned with increasing force a few days later, on May 28th, the day on which Clementin informed his people that King Leopold of the Belgians had surrendered.

That was the day on which I next saw General Réhmy. I entered his office sick at heart, for it seemed that nothing could now save the B.E.F. from destruction. The flower of England and the only considerable British army in existence was apparently faced with surrender or annihilation.

Réhmy had not yet found Privet's engagement book. His men were doing their best, he said, but they had to rely on the Sûreté, and the Sûreté was short-handed. We must have patience.

It was while walking back from his office along the quais, where the booksellers keep their stalls, that I first heard the ominous historic phrase in which, at a time of national crisis, the instinctive distrust of France for her men of affairs comes uppermost: "*We have been sold.*"

It was in a mood of black depression that I answered the telephone which was ringing in my office as I entered. Cheriton was speaking on the private line from the Embassy.

"Come over at once. The great man is asking for you."

I imagined that he was referring to the Ambassador, but, when I walked into the room which leads to the bedchamber where Pauline Borghese once slept, I found, not the Ambassador, but Mr. Algernon Woodstock himself, Prime Minister of England.

I did then what most Englishmen would have done in my place. I had seen that face hundreds of times in newspapers and on the screen. I had seen it, moreover, not only in pictures, but the face itself—on platforms, in the House of Commons, once in a corridor of the Admiralty. But it was a different thing to meet him in a room, at arm's length. And I stared.

This was the man to whom all England had turned. She had ignored his warnings, distrusted his genius, found no place for him in her hours of illusion. But

now she needed faith, courage, imagination, and a tradition which reached back to something more profound and enduring in English life than any of his political contemporaries could supply. Meeting him face to face, I found myself thinking what thousands of my countrymen had thought time and again within the last eventful months: thank God for Algernon Woodstock! And it seemed very fitting that the face, from which a large cigar protruded with an indomitably incongruous air, should recall two creatures for which Englishmen have a special affection—babies and bulldogs.

To-day it was pale and grave. Yet it was not discouraged. It carried the look of a man who was confronting possibilities unexpectedly grievous, but who was not in any sense overwhelmed.

Except for Granby we were alone.

"So you have been driving a tank, Mr. Orford," said the Prime Minister abruptly after we had shaken hands.

"Yes, sir," I answered, "but not very far or very well."

The shrewd eyes above the burning cigar were smiling.

"Well enough to inflict damage on the enemy and, as I understand, with a certain relish."

"It was Colonel Granby who did the damage, sir."

"I should hope so indeed. For you, being a civilian, it would have been most improper to engage in military operations. But perhaps you were determined to justify sentence of death passed upon you by a certain military tribunal."

"A French military tribunal, as it happened, sir."

The chubby, resolute face darkened.

"From what Colonel Granby tells me, we may yet have to see a French tribunal condemning to death men who insist on fighting for France. That brings me to

our present business. I have read your record of a conversation between Mr. Privet and Marshal Villebois."

I leaned forward in my chair.

"And you have warned Monsicur Clementin, sir?"

"I have warned him," he answered quickly, "and I have sent for you to tell you the result. Clementin was very frank."

The Prime Minister puffed for a moment quietly at his cigar. Soon he continued:

"I think he already suspected something of the kind, but he is in a curious position. He has no party behind him and has continually to be playing one section of his Cabinet against the other. That, I am afraid, takes up valuable time which might better be directed to winning the war. It is a monstrous situation. It has already made it necessary for him to admit Marshal Villebois to his Cabinet. He hoped that this manoeuvre would strengthen his position. Clementin assures me that Villebois is an honest man and a patriot. I am bound to accept that assurance. I asked him what he was going to do, and he gave me the answer which I expected. He will do nothing. He pointed out that this conspiracy is designed to meet a hypothetical situation. Privet and his band of wicked men will not dare to act unless or until the French armies are broken. Clementin accordingly takes the view that it would be most unwise to proceed against them at this moment. To tax them with treachery now would provoke a political crisis. It would confuse and alarm the people. He has therefore decided to ignore their activities. He pointed out, among other things, that the reputation of Villebois is in France a talisman as strong and powerful as was that of Kitchener twenty-five years ago in England, and he fears that Privet and his associates will hide successfully behind his honoured name. The French people, he says, cannot be persuaded in a few hours that the Marshal is allowing himself to be used by men

who are prepared to surrender their country to the enemy."

He paused and looked across at me. His voice rose suddenly and he shot at me the question:

"What was your impression of the Marshal?"

"I'm bound to say, sir, that I was much alarmed."

The Prime Minister chuckled.

"As George III said to Wellington of his Generals: '*I don't know whether they will frighten the enemy. But they certainly frighten me.*' But seriously, Mr. Orford, what special reasons had you for alarm?"

"I was alarmed by his spirit and bearing. He seemed like a man who was not only ready to accept defeat, but who regarded it as a necessary and even a salutary ordeal for his country."

The Prime Minister nodded.

"An act of God, with Hitler for God's minister."

"At the same time," I continued, "he was obviously pleased with the deference paid to him by Madame Bertrand and apparently quite convinced that the enemy would be prepared to treat with him honourably as a soldier of France. And I think, if the truth were known, he would rather see a German *gauleiter* in Paris than Monsieur Blum at the Elysée."

The Prime Minister moved impatiently.

"He would stop a tournament to avoid a revolution. I know that view."

There was a short silence. It was broken by Granby.

"I take it, sir," he said, "that of Clementin himself there is no doubt?"

"None whatever," answered the Prime Minister promptly. "I am satisfied that, as long as he remains master of the situation, there will be no surrender. But there are members of this Government of whom I am not so sure."

He leaned forward.

"I must be informed immediately," he continued, "if

Clementin's position in the Cabinet is seriously threatened. I must be warned, either through the Ambassador or directly if there is no time to send me word through the ordinary channels."

He paused and turned to Granby.

"I think you know already what is in my mind," he continued. "France may be compelled by the military situation to seek an armistice. Clementin, supported by certain of his colleagues, could nevertheless save the alliance. The French Government could do what the Governments of Norway and Holland have done. It could continue the war from territory beyond reach of the enemy. There is the French Empire. There is the French Navy. There is the French merchant fleet. There are vast French resources, in money and material, scattered about the world. Is all that to be surrendered? Not by Clementin. Not by the French people, if they have time to know what is being done on their behalf. But there are men who might use these resources in an effort to obtain better terms of accommodation with the German Government. That is a fearful danger, and we must be ready to meet it instantly. Above all, I must have immediate notice of any suggestion coming from any quarter that the French Fleet is to be brought into ports which may come under the control of the enemy. I do not say that things will come to such a pass. Nor am I suggesting that even Privet and Chapeau would deliberately hand over the French Fleet to Hitler, to be used against ourselves. But they might quite conceivably accept Hitler's promise to make no use of it whatever, though they know, as well as we do, the value of such a promise."

He dropped the butt of his cigar into a water-filled ash-tray. I said the first thing that came into my head.

"Surely, sir, it would never come to that?"

He looked at me gravely.

"I hope not, Mr. Orford, but there is already evidence

which we cannot afford to ignore. Three distinguished French naval officers have been relieved of their commands in the last forty-eight hours. I mentioned the matter to Clementin, who informed me that pressure had been put upon him to replace these officers, all over sixty, by younger men. As a youngster of sixty-six myself, I should be sorry to think that these changes were really necessary merely on grounds of efficiency."

He paused. The door had opened to admit the Ambassador.

"So you see, Mr. Orford, the situation needs constant attention. Good morning, gentlemen, and remember this——" He paused again, his eyes suddenly bright and confident. "We shall win this war, even if we have to fight alone."

I left the Embassy with that last word ringing in my ears. Would it, indeed, come to that? That England should be left to fight *alone* the secular enemy of France was a thing as yet incredible. Nevertheless, the man who was leading the English people was facing the possibility and had opened up prospects of peril, treason, or mischance such as I had never imagined.

Walking silently with Granby towards the headquarters of General Réhmy, I tried to face the consequences of a French capitulation—the French armies disbanded, the Gestapo in Paris, France plundered of her substance and harnessed to the German war machine, French harbours and airports serving as enemy bases for Radder's U-boats and Goering's aircraft and, beyond all this, the brightest of all the lamps in Europe extinguished.

It was not till I had left Granby and was making my way to the Ministry that I realised that neither of us had spoken a word till, at parting, we had arranged to meet at Weber's before dinner.

Work at the office filled the interval, and I reached the terrace of Weber's, in the Rue Royale, at six o'clock.

It was one of the days when war-time regulations prohibited the serving of an *apéritif*. So I ordered myself a quarter bottle of champagne, paying slightly more for it than the equivalent of a pint of beer, and sat watching the crowd. It was not so large nor so variegated as in normal times, and most of the men were in uniform. I amused myself by trying to determine the various ranks and corps to which they belonged.

When I looked at my watch a little later I discovered that both Granby and Cheriton—who was also to have come to the meeting—were overdue by at least ten minutes. That, however, did not surprise me. Cheriton was rarely in time for an appointment, for his life depended in the evening on getting through to London, an operation which might take anything up to four hours. Granby, presumably, had been kept by General Réhmy. Nevertheless, as the minutes passed, I became mildly exasperated. I was to dine that evening with Oliver Ackland at his house beyond the city at Marne la Coquette. I had, therefore, little time to spare.

Another quarter of an hour slipped by. I paid my waiter and prepared to depart. It was useless to wait any longer for Granby. I was now almost alone on the terrace and behind me the restaurant was filling with clients.

At that moment, along the Rue Royale, where at that hour the traffic was sparse, came a furniture van. I did not take any particular notice of it until I saw the name 'Machoux et Cie,' painted on the side. That, however, struck a chord in my memory. Just such a van, with just such a name painted upon it, had broken up poor Jules in his car under my very eyes a few days before, when I had been driving towards the house of Madame Bertrand.

The van, now in front of me, was held up for a moment by the traffic lights at the junction of the Rue Royale and the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. I glanced at the

driver, who had a mate beside him. I rose to my feet and stepped forward. There was no doubt of it. The man at the wheel of the furniture van was the man who had smashed into Jules. I identified him immediately, and even as I did so, he turned his head and looked me full in the face. It was no more than a quick look, but into his eyes came an expression I have often seen in the eyes of persons who suddenly catch sight of someone or something for which they are unprepared or of which they are frightened. I knew by the way his eyes narrowed that he had recognised me at once and that he was quite definitely scared.

I must confess that I acted on a sudden impulse. I rose quickly from my chair and crossed the road to my car, which was parked on the other side of the street.

By this time the furniture van was moving forward, the lights having changed to green. I followed it across the Place de la Concorde. It rumbled round the obelisk and made for the Pont de la Concorde. I crossed the bridge some fifty yards behind it.

We followed the Rue de Bourgogne and so into the Boulevard des Invalides, down which we sped until we reached the Rue de Sèvres. I should perhaps have given up the chase except for the fact that the van was taking the general direction which I should in any case have followed on my way to Oliver Ackland's house.

We crossed the Rue de Seine, making, as it seemed, for the Gare Montparnasse. Just short of it, however, we turned into the Boulevard de Vaugirard.

The van was making good speed, for the streets were on the whole deserted. It did not go far down the Boulevard de Vaugirard, but turned again, this time sharp to the left.

The street which we had entered was narrow. Tall houses bordered it on either side, those tall, thin houses with high-pitched roofs so characteristic of Paris. The

street was in deep shadow, for the sun was now well down. The furniture van turned sharp right and put on speed. I accelerated so as not to lose sight of it, only to discover that it had presumably reached its destination, for the street ended round the corner in a small yard bordered by warehouses and littered with the remains of packing-cases. The van stood in the midst of it. I pulled up just outside.

I was wondering what to do next when the van began to move again, describing a wide circle to the left. Almost before I realised what was happening, it had completed the circle and was driving straight towards me.

The driver put on speed.

I was to suffer the same fate as Jules.

There was only one thing to be done, and I did it, or I shouldn't be telling this story. My Citroën was standing in the entrance to the yard. There was no time to reverse, but there was just time to go forward and swing out to the right before the van reached me. I let in my clutch, and the car bounded forward straight towards the bonnet of the charging monster. For an instant I thought a collision was inevitable, but I pulled the wheel hard over and turned the car to the right, at the same time accelerating to maximum. The van loomed for a minute huge and menacing to port.

I felt a slight jar as the back of it struck the edge of the rear bumper of my car. I turned the wheel hard to the left, to avoid running into the wall of one of the warehouses, and stalled the engine.

The roar and clatter of the van behind me suddenly died down. I looked over my left shoulder. The driver's mate had got down from his seat and was running swiftly towards me. He had something in his hand. He reached the side of my car, and I saw that it was a small automatic.

"Put your hands up," he snapped.

"You can't fire that thing here," I answered. "It would make too much noise."

Even as I spoke, however, the engine of the van, which now blocked the entire gateway, began to roar. The driver was treading on the accelerator. The clamour in that confined space between the tall houses was deafening. It would certainly have drowned a pistol shot or, if not, the shot would have been mistaken for a backfire.

The driver's mate gestured to the back of the van. I walked towards it, feeling the muzzle of the automatic digging into my ribs. The door of the van swung open.

"In you get," said the driver's mate.

"Look here!" I began.

"In you get," he repeated.

I clambered over the tailboard and stepped forward into the interior of the van.

It was empty, except for a figure tied hand and foot in the corner. A dirty handkerchief covered its mouth and chin.

It turned slightly on its side and its head went back in a familiar jerk.

It was Colonel Granby.

CHAPTER XII

SOFT PERSUASION

I FELL on my knees beside Granby, but at that moment there came a clang from behind me. I spun round. The iron bar which fastened the back part of the van had fallen into place. At the same moment a trap shot back from behind the driver's seat and a face adorned with a dirty moustache was thrust half through.

"Be dumb or dead," said the face. "It's up to you."

Beside the face was a hand. It pointed an automatic in our direction. Presently this was withdrawn and the trap shut.

I bent down again over Granby, untied the handkerchief across his mouth and removed a quantity of cotton waste which had been thrust between his teeth. He sneezed vigorously.

"Mugs," he said. "Mugs of the same shape and pattern."

"You being a size larger," he added as I got busy at his wrists. "I at least had to be decoyed into this commodious trap on wheels, whereas you seem to have come in search of it."

The last strand of cord binding his wrists parted under the blade of my pocket knife. I bent down and started work on his ankles.

"How did they get you?" I asked.

"Embassy driver," said Granby. "He brought me a message from Cheriton. He said that you had decided to meet me not at Weber's, but at Armenonville in the Bois. It seemed a long way to go for a drink. But I,

knowing the fellow's face, got into the car, thinking no harm. In a lonely part of the Bois we met the pantech-nicon. A man jumped from the tailboard as we were passing it and pushed a gun into my right ear. I adopted, then and there, a policy of non-resistance, whereupon they tied me up and here we are."

"A driver from the Embassy?" I repeated.

"And driving an Embassy car," said Granby. "I may be a mug, but I've been well brought up and I don't get into cars with strange men. I know the faces of all the Embassy drivers."

"And this one, I suppose, was in the pay of the enemy?"

"Well, I don't suppose he does it for nothing. Now it's your turn. How do you come to be here?"

I told my brief and sorry tale while we swayed and jolted from side to side with our backs to the side of the van.

"Mugs, the pair of us," repeated Granby.

"I was to have dined with Oliver Ackland to-night at Marne la Coquette, where he lives with his French wife."

"I'll tell you something about Oliver Ackland," responded Granby. "But not with that face at the window."

I turned and encountered the beady eye of the van driver's mate, gazing at us through the trap which had opened again. He had neither a kind nor a trustful face. It was unshaven and the eyes were bloodshot, and every now and again his lips twitched. Drink, I decided, or drugs—possibly both.

After about thirty-five minutes the van, which had been driven throughout at a high speed, slowed down abruptly and swung so sharply to the left that I was flung against Granby. I heard the crunch of gravel beneath the wheels. The vehicle bumped and swayed, evidently running on an uneven road. Then, with a

jerk, it came to a halt. I scrambled to my knees, but was flung back again as the van moved backwards with a loud roaring of the engine, till it stopped again.

"Keep your eye on Peeping Tom," said Granby. "He evidently has orders from his master to deliver us alive or dead."

The man still had us under observation, and his automatic remained pointing in our direction as the bar holding together the double doors of the back of the van was pulled out of place.

"Come on out of it," said the driver.

We moved towards the open door. Three men, one in shirt-sleeves, with a large curved pipe in his mouth, were standing below the tailboard. Two of them had their hands in the pockets of their jackets.

We scrambled down from the van. The three men said nothing. So, for an instant, we stood.

I had time to observe that the van had entered a stable yard and was backed up close to an open door leading into a large white house, the front entrance to which was somewhere round to the right. The walls were patterned in brick in the worst style of the French Third Empire. They would, I am sure, have delighted the heart of Butterfield. Tall trees, clms they were, grew close to the house and formed part of what seemed to me a large forest. Evidently we were somewhere in the woods that surround Paris—at St. Cloud, St. Germain, Marly, or Fontainebleau.

"In there," said the man with the pipe.

I hesitated a moment. His two companions automatically thrust forward their hands concealed in the pockets of their jackets.

"Go to it," said the man with the pipe.

Granby and I stepped forward side by side through the door. The three men fell in behind us and we marched in procession down a short whitewashed

corridor paved with flag-stones, past an open door, through which I caught a glimpse of an enormous kitchen with copper pots hanging on the walls and a great black range, through another door and up some steep stairs which brought us into the hall of the house or château.

"To the right," said the man with the pipe.

We turned obediently, pushed open another door, and entered a room panelled with pitch pine, on which were hung numerous antlers and other trophies of the chase. It had two long windows giving on to a formal garden separated from the house by a broad terrace. Beyond the garden grew woods, tall, thick, and friendly. Above them was the violet sky, luminous and serene.

Vespasien Privet was seated in a wooden chair behind an elaborately carved and decorated writing-table. Standing a little behind him were two men, one of whom I recognised as someone in the newspaper world, a journalist suspected of Fascist tendencies and a contributor to *Gringoire* and *Je suis Partout*. He was short and sallow-faced, with deep-set eyes, in marked contrast to his companion on the other side of Privet, who was tall, nearly bald, with mild, protuberant blue eyes. Both men were dressed in the type of French suit affected by the black-coated workers of Paris. It is shaped to the waist, usually grey or dark blue with a stripe in it—the sort of suit which to be tolerable must be well fitted, but which, off a peg, never looks like anything but an awful warning to men who try to be respectable.

The three of them stood quite motionless like wax figures in a tailor's window.

We stepped forward towards the desk.

There was a shuffle of footsteps behind us and, half turning my head, I could see that the man in shirt-sleeves and the two men with guns in their pockets had also entered the room. The door closed with a click. Privet raised his head.

"Mr. Orford," he said, "my business this evening is with Colonel Granby. I was not expecting to see you here, but you are welcome."

Granby stepped forward and was about to speak when a door behind Privet, which I had not previously noticed, opened quickly. A woman stood confronting us. She was wearing a black dress. From her neck hung a double rope of pearls and on the second finger of her left hand was a fine emerald.

It was Madame Bertrand.

She turned towards Privet, who had risen to his feet.

"I wish to talk with them alone," she said quietly.

There was a moment's silence. Privet seemed about to protest, but thought better of it.

"Very good, Maryse," he said. "We shall be within call."

He gestured with his hands as he came from behind the desk, as though he were driving a flock of hens or geese. The three men were already shuffling towards the door by which we had entered. Privet followed them from the room.

Meanwhile Madame Bertrand had sat down in the chair vacated by Privet. She looked serious, intent, as it seemed, on collecting her thoughts and choosing her words.

She looked from one of us to the other. Her eyes were clear and hard. Political realism, not defeatist piety, was apparently to be her theme.

"I know, of course, that Mr. Orford has overheard a conversation between my friend Vespasien Privet and Marshal Villebois at the Croix Catalan," she began abruptly.

"In which, if I remember rightly, Madam, you yourself had something to say."

She looked at me, seemingly without malice.

"I know how you must regard that conversation,

Mr. Orford, and the plans which were discussed. To you it must seem that we are plotting to betray our country."

"We would rather assume, Madam," broke in Granby, "that you were planning to serve France according to your lights."

She turned her fine eyes upon him. There was just a touch of offended pride in her manner.

"What do you know of France, Monsieur?"

"I have fought for France, Madam, and I have worked more or less on her behalf for twenty years."

She sat back, placed her elbows on the arms of Privet's chair, folded her hands beneath her chin, and looked first at Granby and then at me for a long moment without speaking.

"I know that love of the Englishman for France," she said at last. "You like to visit our beautiful country, you like to drink our wine, to read our books, to live with us from time to time as we alone know how to live, to flatter yourselves that by doing all this you have brightened your wits and broadened your minds. One of you now and then may even go so far as to declare that, if he had not been born an Englishman, he would have chosen to be one of us. But do not deceive yourselves. For most of you we are just an odd, amusing, and distinctly inferior people."

Granby shook his head.

"A heavy impeachment, but, as I venture to protest, unjust."

"Unjust to you, perhaps, but not, I am sure, to the majority of your countrymen. Even you, Monsieur, do not seem to understand us very well, or you would never have undertaken the mission on which you are now engaged."

Granby nodded gravely.

"I begin to see your drift," he said.

"Surely you must realise that for Britain to interfere

in matters which can only be decided by the political leaders of France must be fatal to the Alliance. You must trust us to meet the situation as seems best to us."

"I have every confidence in France, Madam. I have little or no confidence in Monsieur Vespasien Privet."

"And Monsieur Clementin?"

"Your Prime Minister is a resolute and honourable man. But can he rely upon his friends?"

"You must know very well, Monsieur, that I think only of his interests."

"What you conceive to be his interests may, in fact, be the interests of his political enemies at home and of our common enemy beyond the Rhine."

She received this with a slight, almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, like one who patiently listens to someone who will not or cannot understand.

"I can only repeat, Monsieur, that it would be most unwise of you to interfere in matters that concern our people alone."

Granby leaned forward.

"These are not matters which concern your people alone. France has an ally. She is committed to make no separate peace with Germany."

"You may trust us to honour our obligations," she responded. "Clementin will see to that."

"If he is given the opportunity," countered Granby swiftly.

Madame Bertrand did not reply, and there was a short silence. Then Granby leaned forward.

"What is the purpose of this interview?" he demanded bluntly.

"To convince you that I and my friends understand the present situation and can be trusted to make the best of it. You realise, of course, that we shall do nothing to weaken our defence. The French armies are not yet defeated."

"Those who contemplate the possibility of defeat are inviting it," retorted Granby.

Madame Bertrand gave a little gesture of despair.

"We cannot allow ourselves to be caught unprepared. We may be driven to seek terms from the enemy. I cannot think that even your Prime Minister would deny us the right to save our defenceless people from slaughter and misery, if the military situation made our capitulation inevitable."

"I am sure that he would not be unreasonable. But I am equally sure that he would insist on certain guarantees. He could not allow the security of Britain and the joint future of our two countries to depend on the mercy or fair dealing of Herr Hitler."

Madame Bertrand rose abruptly from her chair. Her face flushed a moment and then went deadly pale.

"I hoped it might be possible to make you see reason," she exclaimed. "But I see that it is useless to continue. You have driven us into war, and now you refuse us the right to make peace. France must fight on to the last man, woman, and child. God's Englishman has so decided. But God's Englishman is a fool. Victory for France at this moment is inconceivable. The people are puzzled and divided. The country is sick. It must have peace. Then, perhaps, our people will recover their souls in a new discipline."

She paused. Granby was looking at her steadily.

"I do not believe for one moment that France is sick, any more than I believe it of my own country. Go out among your people. Listen to what they say and how they think. Your institutions may need revision and the men who control them may be corrupt, but the country is sound."

Madame Bertrand moved impatiently.

"Let me appeal at least to your common sense. Whatever you may hope or believe, the fact remains that your Prime Minister will do no good, but only harm,

if he tries to intervene. These next few days will be critical. There may be serious differences of opinion in the French Cabinet on the best course to pursue. Leave us to settle them in our own time and way. In Monsieur Clementin you have a loyal friend. Do not weaken his position by forcing him to play too openly the English game."

"There is no English game. There is an Alliance."

"Do not parade it unnecessarily. It is not as popular with some of our people as you seem to think."

Granby shook his head.

"I suspect, Madam, you have in mind something more precise than an appeal to our discretion. Your confederate, Vespasien Privet, would hardly have brought us here for so indefinite a purpose."

"You have obtained certain evidence of our intentions. I was hoping to convince you that it would be foolish to use it against us. I see now that you are not open to persuasion. This interview, I fear, has been wasted."

Granby rose and bowed gravely.

"Not entirely, Madam. I know now exactly how and where you stand in this affair."

Madame Bertrand looked at us in turn.

"Very well, gentlemen," she said. "I have not succeeded with you. That may be mortifying to my pride, but it will not affect the issue. I have done what I could. Now I must leave the task to others."

Turning swiftly, she moved to the door through which she had first entered the room. On the threshold she turned back and faced us again for an instant.

"Do not make it too difficult for my friend. He is rather a sensitive person."

The door closed softly behind her. Granby turned swiftly to me.

"John," he said, "this is not going to be a pleasant evening. Stick it as long as you can. Understand?"

I nodded weakly.

"I'll let you know when we've had enough," he added.

I was about to ask him what on earth he meant by this mysterious pronouncement when the door in front of us opened. Privet, with his assistants, came quickly into the room.

CHAPTER XIII

STERNER STUFF

FIVE minutes later I was sitting, stripped to the skin, in front of Privet, my wrists and ankles secured to the back and legs of a wooden chair. Granby, in a similar plight, was a short distance away to the left.

Privet's men certainly knew their work. I had heard a good deal of third-degree methods as practised by the Gestapo and its pupils. It is one of their discoveries that a man without his clothes is more amenable to persuasion than a man with a shirt on his back. It lowers his morale to be reduced to a state of nature.

There were five of them on the job. Two of them stood beside us, with their coats off, waiting for instructions. They wore sleeveless shirts without ties, and their trousers were supported by belts of narrow black leather.

Privet had taken up his position behind the desk. Behind him stood his two secretaries. One of them was tall, with bulbous eyes. The other was smoking a cigarette. A third man, with a curved pipe, his thin coat mottled with sweat, was standing beside the desk manipulating a reading-lamp. It was made of chromium steel and consisted of a single reflector mounted on a universal joint on the end of a rod, which enabled the light to be turned in any direction desired. It seems odd that I should remember all these details so clearly.

I was breathing hard from the fight which I had put up in defence of my trousers. My wrists and ankles were chafed by the cord which bound them and a fine bruise was developing above my left eye. Granby, who had also been subdued after protest, was panting beside me. His body, very white in contrast with his brown,

ELEVEN WERE BRAVE

face, looked particularly defenceless. On his livid against the whiteness of his skin, showed the of the bullet wound which had closed the more chapters of his career. The silence was broken by a click. A beam of light from the lamp on Privet's desk straight into my eyes. It was sharp, clean, and bright as a sword. I winked in its glare. "Now, Orford," said Privet, "you had your chance and you did not take it. We haven't yet got what we want, but we mean to have it. You know to what I refer."

He leaned forward suddenly.

"What have you done with my engagement book?" I shifted my head. The intolerable beam followed it. "I know nothing whatever about it," I said. "I told you so when we met at Madame Bertrand's luncheon party. You believed me then."

"I do not believe you now," he returned. "No matter why. But I don't. What did you do with it?"

"What did you do with it?" he repeated. I did not answer him again.

The man with the pipe removed it from his mouth, walked round the desk, till he was barely a yard away, and shouted at me:

"What did you do with it?"

He moved to the right, after pausing a moment to wait for an answer which did not come. His place was immediately taken by one of the men who had stripped us.

"What did you do with it?" he bellowed.

He moved aside, and his place was taken by his companion, who asked me the same question almost in a whisper. When I still refused to answer, the man with the cigarette joined in the game, then another.

My first reaction was one of relief. I was

amused. The whole thing seemed too childish for words. But I soon had good reason to revise my opinion.

They repeated the question endlessly, not always with the same intonation of voice, but monotonously, pitilessly, like automata, for a period of time that I could not then estimate, but which Granby subsequently informed me was about an hour. Long before the end of that time I was half-crazy. That simple question, endlessly repeated in varying tones, began after a time to have the effect of blows from a hammer. And still the light was levelled straight at my face. I shut my eyes, but the relative darkness was intolerable. It left me more defenceless to the battering upon my ears.

The sweat sprang up at the roots of my hair and began to trickle down my neck. I tried desperately to concentrate on some irrelevant detail—the curved pipe in the hand of the man who worked the lamp, a birthmark on the nose of the man with the cigarette.

Then abruptly the light was switched off and I found myself in darkness.

"Stick it, laddie," came Granby's voice from beside me. "These chaps are getting tired. Ouch!"

I could not see what they were doing to him, but he spoke no more. The sudden silence and the darkness was worse than the light. Then came a hoarse whisper from directly behind me.

"Word has gone round the Villette quarter that anyone who hands in a note-book bound in green morocco will receive 100,000 francs and no questions asked."

For a moment my brain merely welcomed the change of address.

"Can you explain it? Can you explain it? Can you explain it?"

I set my teeth. They were at it again.

"I don't know what you mean."

Was that my voice? It was the first time I had spoken. The effort brought my mind into play. How

did they know that Réhmy had been making inquiries in the underworld of Paris? The answer was obvious. They were of the underworld themselves. I knew enough of police procedure to know that in all great cities, and Paris was certainly no exception, the police rely on informers. Réhmy had put the word round through one or more of these gentry, and these men had got the message.

"You had your pocket picked."

The words seemed to come from a great distance. Privet was speaking.

I did not answer, and Privet continued:

"Where is the note-book now?"

"I don't know."

"Where is it now? Where is it now?"

The process, if I may so describe it, began again. But now it was dark. There was nothing on which I could concentrate my mind.

I remember very little of the next half-hour. I sat sweating in the darkness while the voices screamed or whispered or muttered about me.

At last I heard someone say:

"Let's have a go at the other bastard. I'm getting tired of this fellow."

"One moment," came another voice, "there's one thing we haven't tried."

There were more whisperings. Then I heard Privet's voice, on a note of alarm, in the darkness.

"What are you going to do?"

Someone else replied:

"It's quite all right and I've never known it fail."

A light was switched on, not the light with which they had tormented me, but a dim bulb in the ceiling.

My first thought was for Granby. He had not uttered a word since the light had been put out.

I saw to my horror that he was unconscious. His head had fallen forward and his face was bloodless.

"Lord," said the man with the pipe, "look what's happened to Number Two. And we haven't started on him yet."

"Leave him," said the man with the pipe impatiently. "We'll bring him round when we want him."

"Like a cigarette?"

I turned to find one of the men at my elbow.

He had to repeat his question before I properly grasped the meaning of his words. Tough methods having failed, were they going to try sweet reason? In the confused state of my mind anything seemed possible and I had heard that sudden kindness, after much brutality, often broke down the victim's resistance. Well, they could try as much of that on me as they liked. A cigarette was placed between my lips. A lighter flared under my nose, illuminating a sallow face with a thin line of moustache on the upper lip. I drew thankfully a puff or two. That was a bit better. I drew another puff. But the cigarette was snatched suddenly from my lips. At the same moment my head was seized firmly from behind and gripped so tightly that I could not move. There was nothing to be seen but the glowing end of my cigarette between the fingers of the man who had lit it for me. Suddenly he stepped forward and thrust the lighted end up my left nostril. The agony was intense and I screamed.

"Now will you speak?" said a voice.

Lights were dancing before my eyes, red and green and purple.

"Hold up. He's fainted," said someone as the cigarette was withdrawn.

My nose was a burning coal. The room was full of light now, for someone had switched on some sidelamps, and I perceived that it was not I, but Frivet who had fainted. He lay across the desk and his two henchmen were picking him up.

I remember laughing feebly. Two men had fainted

now, and the only man who had any good reason to faint was as right as rain—except for this horrible pain in the nose.

"Shove his head between his knees," said someone behind me.

"Get him a drop of brandy," said another voice.

Privet was pulled back. He shuddered, sighed deeply, and opened his eyes. A hand was holding a glass to his lips. I heard his teeth rattling on the rim and the gulping sound in his throat as he sucked down the brandy.

"Sorry," he spluttered. "I'm all right now. I don't know what came over me. But Orford's had enough. Stop doing things to Orford."

"But we're just going to get results," objected the man with the curved pipe.

"Do as I tell you. It's an order."

Privet's voice was shaking and out of control.

"Go on," he repeated, "do as I tell you."

The man with the pipe shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will," he said, and turned towards Granby.

They thrust his head down and slapped his bare flesh. Somehow they shook him into consciousness. He sat up on the chair, looking about him with a bewildered air. Suddenly a look of consternation came into his eyes and he turned to me.

"Sorry," he said. "I must have dropped off. I've never known that happen before."

He was looking at me anxiously.

"Are you all right, laddie? What have those boys been putting across?"

"I'm all right," I said huskily.

"It's your turn now," said the man with the pipe.

"Are you going to be dumb like your friend?"

Granby said nothing. The lights went out, but almost at once the reading-lamp was turned upon his face.

So it began again. They used the same technique on him as on me. I wondered in a dumb sort of way how he was standing it, but I was deadly tired. I believe I should have fallen asleep had it not been for the pain in my nose.

Granby answered them back at first, varying his denials with outrageous comments on their behaviour. But they did not allow themselves to be diverted from their intolerable repetitions and presently he fell silent.

They turned out the reading-lamp and once more the whispered rain of questions began in the darkness.

At this stage in the proceedings I felt no fear, only in fact a kind of exaltation. We had stuck it so far and would stick it to the end.

Then suddenly, to my horror, Granby, who had been silent for some time under the pitiless hail of questions, gave a low moan.

"You know where the pocket-book is—come, tell us."

And then other voices in the blackness:

"Tell us, tell us, tell us."

Granby was moaning continuously now. Then suddenly I heard:

"Oh, Christ, I can't go on with this."

"Granby!"

My voice was thick and husky. I wanted to shout aloud. But hands were at my throat pressing on my windpipe and I could not speak. The blood drummed in my ears.

From very far off, it seemed, I heard Granby's voice again.

"Damn you, yes. I know where it is."

"And you will tell us?"

"Yes. But for God's sake give me a drink."

"When you have told us you shall have anything you want."

This was Privet's voice, eager with relief.

There came a click and the room was flooded with

light. The hands at my throat still maintained their pressure. I could see Granby a yard or two away. The sweat was pouring down his naked body. His face was grey, the scar on his breast was a spot of flaming red.

"General Réhmy has the pocket-book," he said. "It was recovered yesterday."

Privet nodded.

"That's better," he said. "Now you will take steps to recover it for me. You will write a letter, please."

"Write a letter," echoed Granby like a child repeating a lesson.

"Loose his right hand."

The man with the birthmark on the side of his nose stepped forward. For a moment I thought that this was a ruse of Granby to get his hands free. But what could he do unarmed, unclothed, surrounded on all sides?

What he actually did, as soon as his right hand was loosed, was to grasp the fountain-pen held out to him. A blotting-pad with note-paper and an envelope was laid across his knees.

"What am I to say?" he asked.

"Tell General Réhmy that you have need of the note-book. Ask him to be good enough to send it in a sealed envelope to the manager of your hotel," said Privet.

Granby began to write. There was complete silence while his pen travelled slowly across the paper.

"Will that do?" he said.

The letter was handed to Privet, who read it through carefully and folded it.

"That will do. Now you will kindly address the envelope."

Granby did so.

"You will now write a note to the manager of your hotel instructing him to hand the sealed envelope when he receives it to the bearer when he calls for it."

Once more Granby took the pen and wrote. When

he had finished, Privet handed both letters to his tall secretary with the bulbous eyes.

"Get on with that at once, please," he said.

The man bowed with a little jerk and, taking the letters, disappeared behind me. The hands on my throat released their pressure.

"And now, I suppose, you will let us go," said Granby, and there is no describing the weary misery of his tone. Privet shook his head.

"I haven't yet received the pocket-book."

"But you will have it soon, and then——"

"I can hardly release you even then," interrupted Privet. "How can I allow either you or Orford to return to liberty? Not after what has passed here. Surely you must see that?"

"I don't see it," protested Granby on a high, hysterical note. "We shan't interfere with you. And we will keep quiet about all this."

He turned his head as he spoke and fixed his haggard gaze on me. I had intended to say that I would refuse to give any such undertaking, but at the sight of his face I found myself saying almost automatically:

"No, we will keep quiet about it."

"I should only have your word for that," said Privet.

"Then what are you going to do?" faltered Granby.

"You will remain here, both of you. You will not again be molested unless, of course, I should fail to recover my pocket-book, in which case we should have to start all over again."

"Do you mean to say," I put in, "that you will keep us here until the end of the war?"

Privet turned his head in my direction.

"Until the end of the war, or at any rate until such time as the Germans arrive in Paris. What they choose to do with you then will not be my affair."

He rose to his feet.

"Give them back their clothes," he said. "I'm going

to lie down. Wake me at once when Jacquart comes back with the pocket-book. Good morning, gentlemen. You have wasted a lot of my time and made me lose a night's sleep, but I thought we should get results."

He walked past me as he spoke and the door closed behind him.

Ten minutes later I was making a poor job of putting on my shirt and trousers. I had been thrust with Granby into a room which served as larder to the kitchen. As a larder it was large; as a room it was very small. Its only window, which gave immediately on to a steep bank covered with coarse grass about a yard away, was covered with wire-netting to keep out the flies. Outside the netting were iron bars. The door, of course, was locked.

The room was quite bare, except for a couple of mattresses and pillows, a stock of tinned food, and two buckets, one filled with sand, the other with water. It had evidently been equipped as an air-raid shelter for the house.

I flung myself down on one of the mattresses and turned my face to the wall. My left nostril was a torment. Otherwise I should have fallen asleep.

I had nothing to say to Granby. For many years he had been my chief. In the service he was a legend. I had nevertheless seen him beaten into submission. But what had happened to us was beyond praise or blame. Flesh and blood has its limits. Yet the fact remained: Granby who had required the last sacrifice from many a brave man had himself capitulated. Soon he would himself realise what he had done. I should have to speak to him then. Meanwhile there was nothing to be said.

Then I realised that he himself was speaking:

"Sorry I passed out," he was saying. "They might have hurt you badly while I was dead to the world."

I sat up astonished. Granby was now in his shirt

and trousers, sitting with his hands round his knees on the second mattress.

"They didn't do so badly," I answered.

I looked at him with increasing bewilderment. He certainly hadn't the air of a beaten man. And why should he apologise for having fainted during my interrogation.

"How are you feeling now?" I stammered.

"Fresh as a daisy," he answered.

He twinkled at me for a moment.

"Come, laddie," he went on. "Did you really think that we'd given ourselves away? The idea was to resist persuasion just long enough to make our final surrender sufficiently convincing. You remember what I said: *I'll let you know when we've had enough.*"

"But look here," I objected. "You've written to General Réhmy."

"Precisely," responded Granby.

"Asking him to hand over the book to the manager of your hotel," I continued.

"Admittedly," Granby confessed.

"Then what's the great idea?"

"My letter to Réhmy will be read as a warning that the bearer is a bad man and that the writer, Colonel Granby, was in a bad spot when he wrote it."

"Have you a secret cipher with the *Deuxième Bureau*?"

"No. But the letter is nonsense, and your Uncle Granby, as Réhmy knows, doesn't write nonsense when he is a free agent."

"How do you mean, nonsense?"

"Because Granby in that letter asks Réhmy to hand over to bearer a pocket-book which Réhmy no longer has in his possession. He gave it to me himself this afternoon."

I sat on the bed looking at him. My feelings were beyond expression.

"Where is it now?" I asked.

"I gave it to Oliver Ackland. He was to pass it on to you this evening."

"By Jove," I said inadequately. "I'm glad to hear it."

Granby shook his head.

"This will be a lesson to you, laddie. But I'm glad you're glad."

CHAPTER XIV

AIR-RAID WARNING

I SPENT the next five minutes in awkward approaches to the subject of Granby's apparent collapse and of my self-reproach at having allowed myself to be deceived in him.

At last Granby said:

"Listen, laddie. If you are trying to apologise for having jumped at the obvious conclusion, let me tell you that I regard your sudden conviction that I was a broken reed as a tribute to my histrionic ability. I intended to convey that impression and I conveyed it.

"There was a woman I knew who had a drunken husband," he continued. "She said to me once: '*I don't mind George getting blind, though he does knock me about a bit when in that condition. But what I cannot stand is his remorse.*' So enough of this untimely brooding. The breast should be beaten, if necessary, in private."

Whereupon I changed the subject and asked him why he had fainted during my interrogation.

"It's the writing on the wall, laddie," said Granby. "My way of life is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf. And to make matters worse, that blackguard with the pipe whacked me under the right ear."

"I'm sorry you passed out."

Granby waved his hand.

"It was nothing," he said airily.

"Not sorry for you," I explained, "but sorry for myself," and I told him about the cigarette.

It was then Granby's turn to show remorse and mine to turn his mind to more urgent matters. I asked him what Réhmy would do when he received Granby's letter.

Granby was of opinion that the General would seem to comply with it and trail the messenger. That, I pointed out, would lead him to Privet and Madame Bertrand.

"He will have them arrested," I ventured hopefully. Granby shook his head.

"You've a nice simple mind, John. But things don't work out like that in this country. Even the head of the *Deuxième Bureau* must think twice about arresting a man who is just about to enter the Cabinet—not to mention the Prime Minister's lady friend."

It occurred to me to ask:

"Did you, by any chance, take a look at Privet's engagement book?"

"Not only that," Granby replied. "I had photostatic copies made of some of the more striking entries. The original was to be kept by you and to be shown, if and when it should be necessary, to Clementin. He will get a nasty shock when he realises what Privet has in mind."

"And what is that?"

"The evidence is not conclusive, but the pocket-book contains among other things a list of the principal units of the French Fleet and notes showing where they are stationed. On another page is a list of the officers commanding the various ships. Against some of the names is a cross, against others a question mark. Privet and his friends are arguing, I think, on these lines. If we surrender unconditionally, we put ourselves at the mercy of the Hun. If, on the other hand, we have something in hand, he will have to be reasonable. Well, Privet and his friends intend to have something in hand. What they do not realise, or what some of them realise only too well, is that Hitler, once the French armies have capitulated, will take everything within reach and give them nothing in return. He will take their ships. He will take their aeroplanes. He will take the 400 German

pilots in France whom the British airmen have helped to shoot down. He will take the French colonies, once they are disarmed, to use against us as military bases and sources of supply. These men are not only ready to capitulate, but to capitulate on terms that will make it possible for Germany to win the war. We've got to realise, laddie, that there are men in France who, if France is forced to surrender, will want England also to sue for peace with the enemy."

I will not record the rest of our conversation. Most of the points we discussed had subsequently to be considered more carefully in consultation with General Réhmy.

You may ask why all this time we did not attempt to escape. The answer is a simple one. There was, as I have said, but one window to the larder and that, though large enough for a man to crawl through, was strongly barred.

After a time I fell into a doze despite the pain in my left nostril, which had now reduced itself to a dull ache only just bearable. I woke to find the room flooded with sunlight. My watch told me that it was one o'clock in the afternoon.

It was very quiet in the larder, so that, when I heard a footstep crunching on the gravel outside, I instinctively turned to the window to see who it was. Granby was already there before me.

Looking through the wire-netting, I beheld two legs clad in the blue-grey trousers of the Royal Air Force moving past our line of vision. At the same instant Granby gave a low whistle. The legs ceased moving. Granby whistled again. The legs turned about and came towards our window. A moment later the fat, round face of Oliver Ackland was peering into our prison.

"Ackland," Granby's voice was sharp.

"Good afternoon, Colonel."

"Go back and get a file or something to cut these bars. We want to leave this place."

"Who's we?"

"Orford is here with me."

"Very good, Colonel."

The feet moved away. I breathed a sigh of relief. Soon we should be free men. I had great faith in Ackland. But how had he found us?

We settled down to wait for our deliverance.

Presently there came, not Ackland with a file, but a mournful wailing from far away. At first I could not think what it was. Then it was taken up close at hand. I looked at my watch. It was twenty minutes past one in the afternoon.

Granby chuckled.

"It's an air-raid warning," he said, "and here we are, safely bestowed in the air-raid shelter."

The wailing of the sirens ceased. It was followed by five-minutes' silence, which prolonged itself into ten, then fifteen, during which time Granby and I wondered how long it would take Ackland to return. Then I heard a drone of engines high up and, a moment later, a series of heavy thuds.

"Bombs," said Granby.

He had hardly spoken when there came a high whistling sound, and I instinctively flung myself face downwards on my mattress as a tremendous explosion tore the air. The house rocked and quivered. Some plaster fell from the ceiling.

"Have they hit the house?" I gasped.

"A near miss, I think," answered Granby.

There was a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach, as though someone had punched me sharply in that region. The next thing I remember was a rattle at the door. Granby and I scrambled to our feet to find confronting us the round and welcome form of Oliver Ackland.

"Well," he said. "What can I do you for?"

It was one of his stock phrases and it had never sounded more sweetly in the ear. Before we could answer a loud thumping and banging became audible from near at hand and then some muffled shouting.

"That will be Monsieur Privet and his friends," said Oliver Ackland with satisfaction. "Would you like to see them?"

"No, thank you," answered Granby moving towards the door, "but I hope they're under restraint."

"They are in the main kitchen, sheltering from the air-raid," answered Ackland.

He flourished a steel key.

We climbed a flight of stone stairs and crossed a hall. We opened the front door and boarded a car, my car, standing in the drive outside. Ackland let in the clutch and the high, steady note of the All Clear sounded above our heads as we drove away. Soon we were running through a village street. The houses were set well back from the road, and in the midst of them stood a small white church rather like the churches Utrillo likes to paint. The car stopped.

"Marne la Coquette," said Ackland. "This is where I live. People eat and drink with me sometimes. Why not?"

Five minutes later we were sitting in the arbour of a small garden, consuming a most excellent dry champagne. Mrs. Ackland, a Frenchwoman of the utmost geniality and charm, could be heard off, urging one François to pull himself together, forget that he was the gardener, and make an omelette such as only he knew how to compose.

"How on earth did you find out where we were?" I asked, turning to Ackland and setting down my glass.

"Good sense," he responded, "competent management, and better luck. I reminded you now and then,

other John, that yonder car, which you call your own, legally mine."

The car in question was in fact registered in Ackland's name. The arrangement was that he should have the use of it except when I happened to be in France. It was a convenient bargain for both of us. He paid the taxes and I had a car on the Continent standing ready to go upon her lawful occasions.

"But you," continued Ackland, "will pay the fine."

"The fine?"

"For leaving it unattended in the streets of Paris," he said.

Light broke in upon me.

"You mean that the car was found by the police?"

"That's what I mean. I was rung up early this morning about it. I hastened round. I identified the car and told the necessary lies—I had lent my car to a friend and so forth. The police were unsympathetic. My friend should not have left the car lying about in Paris. That was negligence, for which one had to pay. I paid a hundred francs and all was well, except that your curiosity was not appeased. Why, I asked myself, I you abandoned a perfectly good car in a cul-de-sac surrounded by warehouses. So, after I had settled the police, I paid a visit to the spot. And then I the boy."

"The boy?"

"He was small and dirty," continued Ackland. "He was also in tears. So I produced a franc and asked why he was weeping. He answered in the words of George Grossmith: '*They didn't believe me*'. I interrogated him tactfully and learned that, before, he had been playing in a doorway where I had seen my car—which he had noted particularly—it had the Union Jack, the flag of the British Tommies, painted on it—drive up close behind the furniture van. He did not know why the furniture

be going into that cul-de-sac, unless perhaps it was to remove the widow Trinquard's furniture. But the widow Trinquard had not sufficient money to hire furniture vans or sufficient furniture to render it necessary. The widow Trinquard was behind with the rent and owed Monsieur de la Clochette, who kept the greengrocer's shop at the corner, for potatoes and fresh eggs. I got him off the widow Trinquard with difficulty and he then related how the furniture van, having entered the cul-de-sac, had charged out again at the motor-car. The small boy had thought a crash inevitable, when by a miracle it was avoided. But the driver of the car had got out and for some odd reason had climbed into the furniture van, which had then driven off at high speed. I asked him if there had been any violence or threat of same. The boy answered that, so far as he could tell, the driver of the car had raised no objection."

"Nor would you," I put in, "if you had felt the wrong end of a pistol digging into your ribs."

Ackland nodded.

"I suspected something of the kind. The furniture van, moreover, had rung a bell, so to speak, for I remembered what you had told me of the van which had charged into a policeman outside the house of Madame Bertrand. I questioned the small boy further, and it was then that he earned another franc, for he told me that painted on the van was the name of its owners, Machoux et Cie."

"I don't remember telling you the name," I intervened.

"No more you did," retorted Ackland. "but it so happens that Machoux et Cie is a firm of furniture removers with a depot at Sèvres, which, as you know, is next door to Marne la Coquette. I pass the place quite frequently. Then I recalled that Madame Bertrand has a country villa at Marne la Coquette.

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She is, in fact, a neighbour of mine. So it seemed to me just worth while to have a glance at the villa. You know the rest. To quote Mussolini's famous ancestor: 'I came; I saw; I conquered.'"

"Consider yourself kissed on both cheeks," said Granby.

Ackland's modest disclaimers were cut short. For at that moment Mrs. Ackland appeared.

"The omelette," she announced proudly, "has transformed itself into a stuffed carp *à la Périgord*."

We passed into the dining-room, where the stuffed carp *à la Périgord* was discussed by all to the exclusion of more material subjects.

CHAPTER XV

SITZKRIEG

ABOUT an hour later, after the application of a soothing ointment to my nostril, which was not yet at peace, I found myself quarrelling with Granby about Henry Cheriton. I wanted to tell Henry the truth, but Granby would not hear of it. He had nothing, he said, against Henry personally. But Henry was in the Foreign Office, where, according to Granby, England may yet lose the war on the playing fields of Eton, or to be more precise, on the examination benches of the Civil Service Commissioners.

"Besides," concluded Granby, "we have yet to discuss the situation with General Réhmy. You will accordingly stick to your desk for the rest of the day and come round to the *Deuxième Bureau* at nine o'clock this evening."

I had therefore to explain to Cheriton how it was that I had not shown up at the Hôtel Cosmopolitain to sleep or at the office next morning to work. He inferred the worst and I allowed him to do so.

All that afternoon I remained in my office. It was the day on which the Germans attacked at Amiens, Peronne and Laon. It was also the day on which we heard that the evacuation from Dunkirk had been completed and that, contrary to all expectations, the men of the British Expeditionary Force, albeit without their arms or equipment, were safely home.

Nine o'clock found me sharing a humble dinner with Granby and Réhmy served in his office and washed down with red wine obtained from a nearby *listra*. Granby looked slightly less careworn than when I had

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him last, and he confessed that he had managed to get three hours' sleep that afternoon. With what had passed, when I joined them, was fully conversant with our experiences at Marne la Coquette. "Now," he said, "we have to take a decision. I can tell you first of all in confidence that our Cabinet is to meet to-night and that there will be certain ministerial changes. Clementin will drop Daladier, transfer Frisson to the Ministry of Public Works, and put Privet in his place."

"But surely," I protested, "you can't allow Privet to secure that position? Clementin must be warned."

Réhmy shook his head. "Clementin, as you know, has already been warned, but the nod even of your Prime Minister is no more good than a wink to the blind horse. Clementin thinks he can keep Privet and his friends better under his eye if he seems to trust them."

"But Clementin," I objected, "does not know that these men are getting ready to lay hands on the Fleet."

"We do not know that," replied Réhmy sharply. Privet's engagement book lay on the table between us. Granby had recovered it from Ackland and brought with him to the meeting. Réhmy picked it up and handed it to me. I flicked its pages. Between them there was a slip of paper, an ordinary office buff marking the place where Privet had set out the list of the whereabouts of the French warships. The names of some of the captains of the ships were written in opposite column. To me these entries seemed enough.

I turned the pages. The name of Rever was frequently, presumably as a person with whom he was keeping appointments. I noticed also references to Chapeau.

"These jottings," said Réhmy, "are sufficient

us on our guard, but they would never suffice as grounds for a public exposure."

"Privet considered them pretty damning or he would never have gone to such lengths to recover the book."

"Admittedly the notes are useful," answered Réhmy. "But our dossier is not yet complete. Nothing less than a clear proof of this man's treason would in present circumstances suffice."

"What do you expect to find?" I asked, not without heat. "A private wire to Berchtesgaden or the Palazza Venetia?"

Réhmy smiled indulgently.

"In a few days," he said, "we shall have quite a nice case proving treachery on the part of Rever, Privet, Chapeau, and a number of others not unconnected with the *Comité des Forges*."

"Meantime," I urged, "we should surely acquaint Clementin with the evidence as far as it goes."

Réhmy shook his head.

"In whose house did you go through those dreadful experiences last night?" he asked.

I saw the point.

"But surely," I objected, "even Madame Bertrand, in the face of what we have discovered, must lose her credit with Clementin."

"What, in fact, have we discovered?" put in Granby, who evidently thought that this conversation had lasted long enough. "That Privet is a friend of Rever. That is known. That they are both interested in the French Fleet. Well, we appreciate the significance of that, but Madame Bertrand will doubtless explain everything to Clementin's satisfaction, and he cannot risk challenging these men unless he is prepared to have them arrested. You have, moreover, apparently forgotten that this conspiracy, as Clementin has himself pointed out, is hypothetical. It will only take effect if and when the French armies are defeated."

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And the news from the front to-day," added Réhmy, good. We must believe the best till we know the worst, and we cannot at this moment do anything to impair confidence in the leaders of France."

He paused. "Then, too," he continued, "there is the personal factor. Clementin is facing bravely an appalling situation. But our Prime Minister is human. This is not, it seems to me, the time for us to tell him that his mistress is plotting with his political enemies to betray him. Sooner or later we may be compelled to open his eyes to the truth. In that case, I suggest that your own Prime Minister should himself intervene. But you must ask him not to use any evidence we may place at his disposal as long as the French armies hold firm. A week's successful resistance, gentlemen, and the whole situation will be changed. Privet and Rever will then fade into the dark background, from which they should never have emerged. You will find that the old Marshal will be gently put in his place. You will find Madame Bertrand a different woman. I therefore ask you to hold your hands."

"Of course," said Granby, "in this situation you alone can be the judge."

"Thank you," answered Réhmy.

There was a short silence.

"Then that's settled," concluded Réhmy.

"Yes," I said slowly, "but what about my position at the Ministry? You'll forgive me, General, how can I carry on with my work under P direction?"

Réhmy smiled.

"I think we have hit upon a solution," he said.

Granby leaned forward.

"We have decided," he said, "that you are your peace with Madame Bertrand."

I looked at him in astonishment.

"You will call upon Madame Bertrand," continued Granby, "and present your apologies. In token of good faith, you will give her this," and he snatched up the pocket-book from the table and thrust it into my hands.

"But this," I objected, "is exhibit No. 1 of the evidence."

"Think a moment," retorted Granby. "Have we not taken a photostatic copy?"

I looked doubtfully at the pocket-book and thrust it absently into my pocket.

"But tell me," I demanded, "how am I to convince Madame Bertrand of my sudden devotion to her interests?"

"You will be clever, candid and cynical. You will assume that she and her friends hate the English alliance and are quite ready to come to terms with Hitler if they can thereby secure for themselves pride of place under the German heel."

"Then why do I give her the pocket-book? Am I to reveal myself as a British Quisling in disguise or a secret emissary of the Link?"

"You give her back the pocket-book because you have come to the conclusion that she and Privet and Chapeau and the old Marshal are powerless to do us or anybody else any serious harm."

"Why?"

"Because the French Army is holding firm. Because the Germans are about to be driven back. Because the Hun will never set foot in Paris. Because, for these and other reasons, there is no need for us any longer to keep the pocket-book, to be used in evidence against them."

"But why return it?"

"Because you are a sensible fellow and, other things being equal, you desire to stand well with so powerful and clever a person as Vespasien Privet, head of the Ministry to which you are attached, and because you

are even more anxious to secure the favours—mark the good old English word—of Maryse Bertrand, a woman of ability and charm, to whose attractions no man in his senses can remain indifferent.”

“You don’t really mean that last bit,” I protested anxiously.

“Most decidedly I mean it,” he persisted. “Maryse Bertrand may be hard enough in the head, but there is a chink in the armour. I noticed that, while she was talking politics to me, she had attention to spare for the tall, silent Englishman at my side. Be kind to her, John, and she will believe almost anything you say.”

I turned in despair to Réhmy.

“Do you approve of this suggestion, sir?” I asked.

Réhmy shrugged his shoulders.

“It is not so bad an idea,” he admitted.

“But Maryse Bertrand,” I pointed out, “is not a fool.”

“That is perhaps to your advantage,” countered Réhmy. “She is the more likely to be deceived into thinking that you are just the clever, self-seeking, amorous young puppy dog, as you say in England, that you will so successfully impersonate.”

We were silent for a moment. Réhmy was looking grave again.

“Meantime,” he added, “we must be ready to act if the situation changes for the worse. If the French armies break—if it comes to a struggle between Clementin, who will desire to fight to the end, on the Aisne, on the Loire, on the Pyrenees, and, if necessary, to transport the Government to North Africa, and Privet, Rever, and Company, who will desire to surrender, then the knowledge that we have obtained may just tip the balance, just succeed, in fact, in giving Clementin the extra strength which he will so sorely need to overthrow the very powerful combination against him.”

I looked from one to the other. They nodded and

smiled. Evidently they had worked the whole thing out before my arrival.

I threw in my hand.

"Very well," I said. "I'll do what I can."

Réhmy pushed one of his telephones towards me.

"Ring up Madame Bertrand," he said, "and ask her to receive you as soon as possible. The telephone number is Maillot 4531."

CHAPTER XVI

RESTITUTION

ENT the next morning in a state of suppressed pain.

*Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.*

That is how I felt about my forthcoming interview with Maryse Bertrand.

She had been quite gracious on the telephone and had appointed four o'clock in the afternoon as the time of our meeting. I was due at that hour to attend a Press conference, and I had therefore to explain matters to Cheriton. This was difficult, for I could not tell him why I was going to see Madame Bertrand, but only that I had arranged to do so.

"You told me," I said, "to cultivate this lady."

"In your spare time," he grumbled.

"I haven't any spare time," I pointed out.

"Very well," he said. "Get Ackland to attend the conference. He is at the Crillon this morning. Ring him up."

"I can't do that," I answered. "The telephones are cut for all ordinary purposes."

"Then send him a message," answered Cheriton crossly.

The sudden restriction of the telephone service posed by the Governor of Paris two days before, when the city had been declared within the army zone extraordinarily awkward for our work. I little guessed that I should live to bless the inconvenience.

The Ministry that morning was in a state of flux. Privet was taking over from Frisson, which meant that nothing was being done. It also meant that my careful work of the last fortnight was utterly destroyed, for, within an hour, all the heads of department with whom I had established cordial relations had been dismissed and their places taken by Privet's men. This was presumably a normal consequence of a change in the French Cabinet, and it helped to explain the chaos into which French public and official life had fallen. The outgoing officials left their posts with an air of weary fatalism. They obviously expected nothing else.

Four o'clock that Sunday afternoon I left my car in the Rue Windsor, rang the bell of Madame Bertrand's villa, and waited for the elderly butler to open the door.

The events of the last twenty-four hours had strengthened my hand. Clementin had broadcast for a third time to the nation saying that the battle of France had begun and that Weygand was satisfied with the situation. The officials of the Ministry had been almost light-hearted. All this was to the good, for I was now required to play the part of a man convinced that the French armies would successfully hold the Germans back.

I was conducted, not to the garden, but to a small drawing-room with long French windows, partially masked with some kind of flowering shrub in tubs which stood on the terrace outside. The furniture of the room was in excellent taste. I noted particularly, a small Empire *commode*, with a picture of Napoleon inlaid in its ebony top. I was examining it with interest when Madame Bertrand entered the room. She wore a grey silk dress, which somehow contrived to show off her still excellent figure. The old Marshal, I reflected, would not have approved. She was very carefully made up, her lips toning with the colour of her shoes and finger nails.

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"You like my Napoleon piece," she said.
"I took the outstretched hand, which I bent over and
I have never seen anything quite like it before," I
responded.

"It was made to the Emperor's order," she continued.
"The portrait is well done, is it not?"
"Napoleon was represented in his characteristic attitude, hands behind his back. The famous grey overcoat was reproduced in light oak. He appeared to be standing on a cliff looking out, perhaps from Boulogne towards the England which he was hoping to invade."
"It is quite authentic," she went on, "even down to the key and the bronzes."

"I was feeling desperately anxious to come to the business in hand. So I pulled out Privet's engagement book and laid it near the figured head of the Emperor.
"Here is something which may perhaps be of greater interest," I said.

"She gave a fleeting glance at the note-book and then turned back to me.

"Why do you bring me this?" she demanded. "If, as seems to be the case, you wish to restore it, why did you not take it back to Monsieur Privet, to whom it belongs?"

"I gave her what the Victorians were, I believe, accustomed to describe as a bold look.

"I thought that it might come to him more appropriately from you," I replied.

Her eyebrows went up.
"Why so?"

"I assumed an air of great frankness.
"Monsieur Privet owes his entire position to Madam. It seems, therefore, to be only fitting that I should place him still further in your debt."
She picked it up, crossed the room, unlocked the writing-desk, and stowed it away.

"I will give it to him when he next calls," she said.

There was a silence between us. She had left me derelict in the middle of the soft Aubusson carpet. I don't know what I looked like, but I feel something of a fool. She had given me no key to her mood, except to convey, by a hardly perceptible movement of the shoulders and a smile that had hovered for a moment on her painted lips, that she was still waiting for an adequate explanation of my visit. She stood there very quietly. Her pale face, in the shadow of her blue-white hair, was softly framed by the green silk curtain.

I realised, of course, that it was her intention to make me feel awkward. That made me angry and gave me confidence.

At last she said:

"Sit down, Mr. Orford. Will you have tea or a glass of port?"

"I should prefer tea," I said.

She touched a bell and sat down herself at the end of a sofa, the only modern piece of furniture in the room.

"Tea, Jacques," she said to the footman who answered the bell.

Still she was silent, looking at me gravely, one arm along the back of the sofa. I noticed the length and beauty of her hands.

Two could play at this waiting game:

"Your garden," I said, "is quite exquisite now that I am able to see it in daylight."

"But sadly neglected," she answered. "We have no men to spare for such work at this time."

It was true that the grass was long, as in the gardens of the Tuileries.

"So for once," I continued, ignoring the mockery of her glance, "you give nature a chance. Your roses look none the worse for it."

Jacques entered with the tea. She poured it out. I rose from my chair and took the cup.

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l, Mr. Orford," she said, "have we finished now
y garden?"
obedience to a hardly perceptible gesture I sat
on the sofa beside her.
You would like me, perhaps, to tell you exactly why
n asking you to give back to Monsieur Privet the
k which he is so anxious to recover."
t sounded like a sentence from a French primer, but
at is how I felt.

Madame Bertrand shrugged.
"I am not impatient. You came here to tell me about
t. You will do so in your own time and way."

I set down my cup.
"I have come to you for several reasons," I said.
"To begin with, I have no great desire to be assassi-
nated."

These were shock tactics. So, at least, I hoped. But
they failed to impress Madame Bertrand. Not a muscle
of her face moved.

"You think, then, that you might be liable to such a
fate?"
"Monsieur Privet recently arranged to have me shot
as a spy when I visited the battle front, and yesterday
I was forcibly abducted from the streets of Paris. What
followed in your house at Marne la Coquette was not
reassuring."

"That I can well imagine. But you will admit, my
friend, that I gave you every chance to avoid it.
Appealed to your better nature and to that of your
English confederate."

She paused and looked me over in an oddly medi-
tative fashion.

"I am to take it, then, that you wish to avoid a rep-
tation of that unfortunate experience."

"You certainly may," I warmly assented.

"And that is why you have decided to return
note-book?"

"I have already said so."

She shook her head.

"You must think of a better reason than that," she returned.

She laid her hand on my wrist.

"Do not underrate my intelligence, Mr. Orford. And please do not slander yourself. You are not lacking in courage, or you would not be sitting here with me."

"It's not a question of courage, Madam. Common prudence requires that I should make my peace with Monsieur Privet. He is head of the Ministry to which I am attached. He can make things quite impossible for me in Paris or he can help me to fulfil my official mission with credit."

Madame Bertrand sat back on the sofa, as though to take a more general view of me. She opened her arm along the back of it, a gesture which tightened the folds of her dress, showing her to better advantage.

"You are ambitious, Mr. Orford," she said.

It was not a question. She simply didn't believe it.

"I have a career to make like anybody else," I persisted warmly.

"This portrait which you draw of yourself depresses me," she sighed. "For one thing, it is most tediously familiar. I know so well this young man with a career to make. He is not very brave or very clever, but is always looking about for a chance to be of service to Monsieur le Ministre and to make himself agreeable to any woman who is supposed to have influence with those in authority. That is how you would present yourself, is it not? But that is not at all how I see you, Mr. Orford. You are a brave, and rather a simple, Englishman, and you would rather be hanged than accommodate yourself to Monsieur Vespasien Privet. Do you really hope to persuade me that you are anxious to assist him or to set his mind at rest? I do not believe it."

I looked at her. I hope steadily.

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y well, Madam. I will be frank with you. I
urning the pocket-book because I have come to
nclusion that it cannot possibly be of any further
my employers."
hey are aware, then, of your visit?"
Of course."

And they no longer attach any importance to our
ivities?"

"We happen to know that Monsieur Privet and his
ends are making plans which will become operative
ly if it should be necessary to seek an armistice. But
ne French armies are standing firm. Only last night—
as of course you know—Monsieur Clementin said over
the radio that General Wegyand was satisfied with the
situation. That being so, there ceases to be any reason
why we should continue to antagonise Monsicur Privet
or provoke a political scandal."

I looked at her hopefully. But quite obviously she
was still quite unimpressed.

"You believe that?" she said.

"I do."

"You are very confident, Monsieur."

She was silent for a moment, thinking things over.

"So you want me to speak on your behalf to Monsicur
Privet?" she said at last.

"That was the object of my visit?"

"Why did you not go directly to the Minister? Why
did you come to me?"

"I have explained that already. You have great
influence with Monsieur Privet."

She shook her head.

"If I am to do as you wish, Mr. Orford, you must
give me a better reason than that."

I flung up my hands.

"What is the use?" I exclaimed. "You
evidently decided not to believe a word I say."

"I refuse to believe that you are in the least afraid."

Monsieur Privet or that you are thinking at this moment of your career at the Ministry. I am further convinced that, if for any good reason you wanted to make a bargain with the Minister, you would go to him directly. But you have come to me. Why? Not for your own advantage. Not to put yourself right with Monsieur Privet. That would be foolish. For Monsieur Privet is unlikely to take well a woman's word on behalf of another man. No, Mr. Orford, you came to me because you and your chiefs know very well that I am perhaps a more important person than Vespasien Privet or Ernest Chapeau or Lucien Rever. You wish therefore to make your peace with *me*, to put me off my guard, to persuade me perhaps to forgo my plans. Well, Mr. Orford, you know my mind. I believe that France will be driven to make peace, and I am determined that my old friend, Clementin, shall be rescued from the false position in which he stands. He sees himself as the heir of Clemenceau. I see him as the man who can come to reasonable terms with Herr Hitler and rescue France from the English alliance. I am sincere and I cannot be moved. You can do nothing here for those who have sent you to spy upon me or to turn me aside."

I rose from the sofa and walked to the window. I remembered Granby's instructions and for the first time realised their significance. This was the fatal woman. I had somehow to win her confidence. Privet was neither here nor there. It was Madame Bertrand who had familiar access to Clementin and would use her influence, when and if the moment came, to fit him into her projects for France; it was she who would play the decisive part in the tragedy.

It was now or never. I turned from the window and moved swiftly towards her. I felt a fool. I looked a fool. But that was all to the good.

"Politics," I stammered. "Do you never think of anything else? What can I say? Too little or too

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Do all the men who come here see in you no more than a woman who can be useful to them or an opportunity to be placated? I do not believe it. I did not go to you in that way. I might, as you have pointed out, have gone direct to Privet. But I saw and took advantage of the opportunity to come to you. Must you look for any other reason than the simple fact that I wanted to see you again."

I was afraid she would laugh in my face. I had not dared to look at her while I was speaking, but stood, in a flushed confusion, by no means assumed, staring at the floor between us. When I ventured to raise my eyes I was startled by what I saw. She was a woman transformed. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks suffused. She rose from the sofa and walked to the mantelpiece, on which was standing a box of cigarettes. She took one. It had a gilt tip. I took up a box of matches from a table beside me and went to light it for her. A faint whiff of the scent she used came to my nose.

"Well, Madam," I said sullenly, as though ashamed of my outburst, "is that a motive which you can understand?"

She was looking at me now without a trace of the mockery which I had hitherto found so disconcerting. The gaze she bent upon me was serious and searching. "It is a simple motive," she said. "But how am I to believe that it is genuine? I have given you little cause to think kindly of me?"

I waved my arms in clumsy, vehement protest. "Must you remind me that we have been forced to meet as enemies? Not that I regret it. I would rather have you for an enemy than an indifferent friend have said that I believe you to be sincere. I can add you for that. But, in any case, what does it matter? Kindness, on one side or the other, has no part in the motive which brings me here. Nor can there be peace between us. I am bound to oppose you."

that is superficial. Do you never wish to forget that you are a political person?"

I could see that she was not yet convinced of my infatuation.

Abruptly she threw away her cigarette. She was obviously shaken. I could see it in her eyes, read it in the grip of her fingers upon the mantelpiece. But she was not yet sure of me.

"This is a dangerous game you are playing," she said slowly. "Either it is a supreme insult, which I should never forgive, or it is a compliment to which I might not be indifferent. So be careful, be very careful. I am not easily deceived."

"I see how it is with you," I retorted. "You have spent so much of your time with men who try to impose on you and use you for their own selfish purposes that you no longer recognise an impulse that comes from the heart."

I paused and looked at her as a man looks at the women he fancies.

"Or are you simply playing with me?" I demanded. "You find it amusing, perhaps, to misunderstand the clumsy Englishman who does not express himself very happily in a language not his own? I cannot believe that you are such a novice as not to know when a man is false or true. You have experience in these matters. Is it not so, Madam? You know very well that, though you cast yourself for the part of a female *eminence grise*, the power behind the throne, men still see in you a woman to be desired."

She looked at me from under her eyelids. I had pleased her at last.

"Still, Monsieur?"

"As it has always been and will be to the end," I declared with a conviction not wholly assumed.

"And confess, Madam," I said, pressing my advantage "you would not have it otherwise."

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smiled outright.

you are insolent, Monsieur. But I have not yet
ed to believe you."

sketched a gesture of deep despair. She stood
g me, her hand still gripping the mantelpiece.
Nevertheless," she continued, "I am perhaps open
conviction."

I was lost now unless I made good my protestations.
Her fingers, as I touched them, were hot on the cold
marble. They turned in my hand. I moved closer and
put my other arm across her shoulders.

At that moment came a sound behind us and a
voice:

"Is Madam receiving?"

She swung round.

The door had opened and the butler stood on the
threshold.

"It is Monsieur Rever," said the butler.
She stood a moment motionless.

"Show him in," she said.

I looked with interest at the man who entered. I had
often seen his picture in the Press and on news reels:
But this was the first time I had seen the man himself.
He was wearing the white collar and cream satin tie
depicted by so many caricaturists. They threw into
startling relief the swarthy face, the bright red lips, the
black moustache, the greasy black hair and brilliant
black eyes, the sombre black coat. The tie was not too
clean and the coat was dusty.

"No man," I thought, "can possibly be as repulsive
as this one looks."

He came straight up to Madame Bertrand, bowed
and kissed her hand. His face had a sly, triumphant
look, the black eyes were shining. He took no notice
of me, and I stood a moment awkwardly gazing
them.

"I must be going, Madam," I said at last.

no idea it was so late. I must be getting back to the Ministry."

Rever turned and looked at me. Madame Bertrand presented us. His pudgy hand was hot and dry.

"I am not turning you away, Monsieur?" he said.

"I have already said that I must be going. It was kind of you to receive me, Madam."

"I was delighted, Monsieur," she answered formally. "I will not forget your message."

I took her hand and kissed it ceremoniously. She held it for an imperceptible instant against her lips.

I was shown out by the butler, my mind in a whirl. I could not have said at that moment whether I felt relief or annoyance at Rever's intrusion. He was moving towards one of the chairs by the window as I left the room.

A moment later I was in the broad road shaded with plane trees and moving towards my car. I had reached it, and was about to get into the driving seat, when I stopped. Rever's face, with its look of alert satisfaction, came vividly to mind.

I acted on impulse, but I felt that there was nothing else I could do. I left my car, turned a corner, and found myself looking into the front garden of the next villa. I could see it plainly through the trees and shrubs. It was shuttered and obviously uninhabited. The occupants had evidently left Paris for the safer surroundings of the Riviera or the Côte Basque. I tried the gate. It was locked, but on either side of it stretched a low wall surmounted with a spiked railing.

The street under the June afternoon sunshine was deserted. I threw off my coat, flung it across the spikes of the railing, jumped on to the low wall, and climbed over, using my coat as a pad. I then put it on again and made my way as fast as I could to the hedge separating the two gardens. It was of thick privet. At its farther end was a space where I conjectured many a

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had been lit on autumn days. Here the hedge
in enough for me to break through. I did so, and
myself in Madame Bertrand's garden.
left the shelter of the hedge, crossed the unkempt
n, and followed a line of dwarf cypresses bordering a
h. I dodged from tree to tree, and presently came
the end of the terrace. I crept along the terrace till
reached the shelter of the shrubs which grew under
the window from the painted tubs.
Here I crouched down. No one in the drawing-room
could see me, but I was exposed to the gaze of anyone
in the garden.

"Then I will see him as soon as possible."

It was Madame Bertrand speaking.

"There is no need to do that. He knows the situation.
Meantime we must keep in touch. I am leaving for
Bordeaux to-night. I want you to come with me."

"Why to Bordeaux? Is the Government moving
south?"

Her voice was sharp.

"It will do so if our plans go forward, and a decision
is now imminent. The Germans have broken the line
at Forges les Eaux. Two hundred of their tanks are
through."

"And Chapeau?"

"He will be with us at Bordeaux."
At that moment I heard a footstep on the terrace.
swung round.

Advancing towards me in a purposeful manner was
an elderly gardener. He carried a pair of shears,
kind which is used for clipping hedges. Beside
walked the butler.

CHAPTER XVII

EXODUS

I STEPPED towards the pair of servants. I was moved to take a high hand.

"Go away at once," I ordered. "Don't interfere with what doesn't concern you."

"It is your visitor, Marysc," said a voice behind me.

I turned round. Rever was at the window. Only his face was visible—the face of an idol carved by someone who knew his job and was slightly influenced by the Chinese. Beside him was Madame Bertrand.

So there I stood between two fires, attacked in front and rear, or whatever other expression is most appropriate to the situation.

"Madam," said the butler, "this gentleman was perceived by Hector"—and he jerked his head in the direction of the gardener—"crouching behind the shrubs in a suspicious manner. I did not realise that he was the late visitor of Madam."

"You'd better come in, Mr. Orford," said Madame Bertrand, and she motioned me to step through the open window.

Rever, I noticed, was not looking at all surprised—still less disconcerted. There was even the suspicion of a grin about his thick lips. Rever was an Auvergnat, and he had in excess, as I had often heard, the queer vanity of the more astute inhabitants of the Aberdeen of France. No one, it is there maintained, ever got the better of an Auvergnat. I had been caught properly at a game which two could play, and none better than

Lucien Rever. That apparently was his attitude to my intrusion.

I entered the drawing-room feeling and doubtless looking pretty cheap.

"Who is this gentleman," asked Rever, "and what is he doing here?"

"It is Monsieur Orford," answered Madame Bertrand, "of the British Embassy."

Rever grinned outright. His white teeth, between the red lips, looked marvellously clean in contrast with the rest of his person.

"This, I imagine, is what is officially described as intelligence work, Monsieur?"

I decided to ignore Rever and turned to Madame Bertrand.

"Madam," I said, "I owe you an explanation. I should be glad to give it to you immediately and alone."

She turned to Rever. I had no key to her mood. Her manner was entirely formal.

"Will you excuse me?" she asked.

Rever stood a moment, his eyes a little screwed up.

"If you think it necessary."

"Please."

He bowed jerkily, turned, and walked from the room. Madame Bertrand was at the window.

"Of course, Hector," she was saying, "go on with your work."

I heard the gardener's step retreating. She waited for the door to close upon Rever. Then she turned to me. There was no doubt now of her feelings. Her face was flushed. She was breathing hard. She advanced upon me.

"So this was the meaning of your comedy," she exclaimed, "and I was almost fool enough to believe you. It is you who think only of politics."

I made up my mind in an instant. Hell has no fury

like a woman scorned. If I let her think now that I had deliberately played on her feelings to secure an accommodation with Privet she would be my bitter enemy to the end of the chapter.

I met her half-way. I seized her by the shoulders.

"Politics," I said hotly, "have nothing to do with this. I might have had you in my arms. But that man must needs break in as though he had a right to enter your house at any time and to do as he pleased. Do you imagine that I could allow myself to be turned away so easily—leave you here with him, your lover, perhaps? I had to come back, to see for myself, to be near at hand."

Her expression changed. The anger faded from her eyes. Then came doubt and finally conviction.

But I could not hold her thus at arm's length. I must now play this game to the end. I drew her towards me. For a moment she held back. Then, imperceptibly, she was nearer. I could see nothing but her bright mouth.

In another moment her arms had closed about my neck. I had almost forgotten that I was playing a part. I kissed her ardently, and in full measure my kisses were returned.

Presently she drew back.

"Not now," she murmured. "Lucien is waiting. He will be back in a minute."

"Say that you will never doubt me again," I urged. She smiled.

"If I doubt you again," she said in the accents of the serpent of old Nile, "it will be for you to convince me again that you are in earnest."

At that moment there came a knock on the door. I stood back.

"Come in," said Maryse.

It was the butler who entered.

"There is a Monsieur Cheriton who has urgent

business, he explains, with Monsieur Orford. He begs to be received without delay."

"Cheriton?" repeated Maryse.

"He is the Press Attaché at our Embassy," I said. "Incidentally he is my chief."

"Show him in," she ordered.

The butler threw open the door. Henry Cheriton stood on the threshold. He turned to Maryse.

"Pardon my intrusion, Madam," he said. "It is due to the fact that we can no longer telephone. I am sorry, but Mr. Orford is wanted most urgently by the Ambassador."

Then I saw that behind Cheriton, Rever was standing.

"Yet another visitor," he said as he came into the room.

Before Maryse could speak he added, turning to my friend:

"But I know you. You are Mr. Cheriton. Of the British Embassy, are you not?"

Cheriton nodded.

"I was just explaining to Madame Bertrand that I had come to fetch my colleague. The matter, unfortunately, is very urgent."

Rever looked interrogatively towards Maryse.

"If Monsieur Orford is wanted by the Ambassador," she began.

"Most urgently," said Cheriton.

I turned and held out my hand.

"In the circumstances, Madam."

"Of course," she said, "you must go."

She took my outstretched hand in her own. I bent and kissed it. Her fingers pressed mine for an instant and were then withdrawn. I turned about, bowed to Rever, who did not offer to shake hands with me, and followed Cheriton from the room.

"Now," he urged, as we climbed into my car, "get back to the Embassy as fast as you can."

"I understand that the news is bad," I said. "The Germans have broken through at Forges les Eaux."

"That is why I came for you. The Ambassador wants you to leave Paris. We are moving to Tours. How did you get the information about Forges les Eaux? It is still supposed to be a black secret."

"Rever brought the news to Madame Bertrand."

In a sudden access of warmth and affection towards the man at my side I decided to ignore Granby's instructions.

"Listen," I added, "and I will tell you all about it."

He heard me in silence, as I described what Granby, Réhmy and I had been doing in the last forty-eight hours.

"So you will be going to Tours, I suppose, while Granby remains behind in Paris," he observed when I had finished.

In the courtyard of the Embassy a huge green lorry was being packed with office and other furniture. Oliver Harvey, the Minister, was walking from the Chancellery in the company of Mack, the First Secretary. Their faces were grave but serene. Francis Gilmour, establishment officer, almost more French than English—or so he likes to think—greeted me in Oberlin's office, where sat the impeccable Miss Niblett, princess of secretaries.

"The Boche," Gilmour announced, "are now well over the Aisne and we have had orders to quit. You will proceed to Tours. There you will set up an office and get into touch with Privet's Ministry when it arrives, if it has not already done so. You will also arrange for communications with the château allotted to the Ambassador, which is, I understand, some twenty-five miles from the town. The Ambassador will leave early in the morning."

"Thank you," I said. "It sounds a good day's work."

I went round to the Ministry, to find everything in confusion. Large canvas sacks lay about on the floors and outside the doors of the offices. They were stuffed with papers, typewriters and the more portable forms of office equipment. The Ministry, it appeared, was to be evacuated by train, but no one knew when it would start or from what railway station. There was no sign of panic or alarm, but over everything a curious indifference. The Germans were apparently coming to Paris. Well, it couldn't be helped. Meantime the usual uncertainty and chaos prevailed. The odd thing was not that these people did not know what was going to happen next, but that they did not seem greatly to care.

I helped my French secretary to pack some of the office equipment. Then I offered to ascertain for her, if I could, the train which she was to take and to get her a place. To my astonishment she stoutly refused to go.

"I am not leaving Paris," she said. "I do not admit the necessity."

I admired her spirit and wished it had been shared by some of her leaders.

Granby rang me up later in the afternoon from Réhmy's office. He would not speak to me on the wire, but asked me to meet him at the King Charles, where I took my final instructions over a *canette* of beer.

"The situation," said Granby, "is not yet desperate, and the Government may yet decide to remain in Paris. We must assume, however, for the moment that they will be moving south. It will be your job, when you get to Tours, to let me know as soon as possible where Clementin intends to establish his headquarters. I understand that the various ministries are likely to be scattered about all over Touraine. I shall be in constant touch with our own Prime Minister, who will

come over at once if things should take a turn for the worse."

"If the position is so serious," I suggested, "ought we not to warn Clementin more urgently against Privet and his friends? I should have said that we had already secured sufficient evidence to have them all shot."

Granby shook his head.

"You haven't even yet grasped the situation," he said. "I feel myself that at any moment France may fall to pieces under our eyes—not the people themselves, who will know nothing about it till it is all over, but the whole apparatus of Government and the social framework of the country. We must be ready to help Clementin all we can; but, if we are not careful, we may yet live to see these traitors on the bench and the loyal servants of France in the dock."

I said no more, but went to the Hôtel Cosmopolitain and packed a suitcase. The little maid who helped me was gay. I wondered why.

"My man came to me last night," she said. "He lorry-jumped all the way from Evreux just to have a night with me. There's a husband for you, and he can't go back."

"Why not?"

"Because, so they say, the Germans are there already," she said cheerfully.

This girl simply stated a fact. It must be accepted. Meantime her man was with her. Why not make the best of a world where nothing mattered very much even while it lasted?

I left for Tours that evening with Oliver Ackland after dining with Henry Cheriton at the Crémaillère in the Rue du Fauxbourg St. Honoré, close to the Embassy. It was, I felt, the last good dinner I should eat for many a long day. I remember a dish of wood strawberries with cream and a bottle of Vosne Romanée of the great

year 1911, which, despite its age, was as perfect a wine as I ever hope to drink.

Savouring this noble vintage, we watched a German aeroplane dodging the shells above Paris. The Germans were now reported to be not twenty miles away, at Pontoise.

After dinner I had some three-quarters of an hour to spare before meeting Ackland. I decided to take a farewell look at Paris and drove in a taxi as far as the church of the Sacré Cœur on Montmartre. I stood at the top of the tall flight of steps leading up to the church. The city spread quietly away to the horizon, not, as of old, picked out in brilliant lights, but fading softly from gold to grey in the last of the evening light. It was very quiet. I could hear trains in the Gare St. Lazare and, now and again, a faint cry from the horn of some motor-car threading the darkening streets. Away to the north-east the sky was lit with flashes.

Paris waited.

I could not see her people, but only the city herself. She inspired me at that moment with a sad confidence. Such serenity at such a time was only possible in one of the Immortals.

I drove thence in a taxi to the Porte d'Orléans, where Ackland was to meet me with my car.

The Porte d'Orléans, as you may know, bears no resemblance to a gateway, but is a wide open space traversed from north and south by the Avenue and the Rue d'Orléans and from east and west by the Boulevard Brune and the Boulevard Jourdan. It was crowded with people crying urgently for taxis, with private cars moving slowly through jam after jam, and with military transport, including, here and there, medium and light tanks which clattered along the roadway or joined a long queue of vehicles lining the side of the wide road.

I waited three-quarters of an hour in the square. The flashes of the guns to northwards were like a feeble

parody of the northern lights. At last Ackland appeared, nosing his way through the press. His wife, silent with the misery of departure, sat beside him.

"Sorry I'm late," he said, "but the roads are packed and I was stopped by pickets."

"How did you get through?" I asked, after greeting Madame Ackland.

"The number plates," he said. "R.A.F. is a good passport."

CHAPTER XVIII

RETURN JOURNEY

as now very dark, for the moon was only three old and the plane trees, in full foliage, grew beside road.

Within a short distance of Paris we ran into an endless stream of cars with dimmed headlights moving in the opposite direction. We had ourselves taken the Route Nationale No. 20, having decided to make Tours by way of Blois in preference to the road through Chartres and Chateaudun. The stream of cars which we encountered must have been coming from Rouen and Evreux. They carried some of the refugees from Normandy, who were making a wide detour, the direct roads to Paris being under machine-gun fire and subject to bombing. They moved slowly past us in the darkness.

Our progress was further hindered by frequent road blocks, where French soldiers stopped us to examine our papers. The R.A.F. number plates on the car, however, in all cases sufficed to get us through without difficulty. Nevertheless, we had not, I think, gone more than twenty-five miles by midnight.

We came upon strings of lorries with an occasional tank. They were drawn up under the trees for the most part, and whenever we switched on our headlights to see where we were going, angry cries of "*lumières*" assailed us from the shadows, or a man with tin hat and a long bayonet on the end of a rifle would advance upon us with menacing gestures.

Towards midnight we had a small stroke of luck. Beside the road was a little *bistro* from which light streamed in golden bars from imperfectly screened windows.

"This," said Ackland, "is where we have a drink. After which, brother, you will take over."

We drank a coffee laced with brandy in a room full of soldiers. Some of them were Poles, with no word of any language but their own. I stood four of them a litre of wine and, shaking hands, we pledged each other silently.

On taking the road again we made Mrs. Ackland comfortable in the back of the car, surrounded by suitcases, and she presently fell asleep. We could now make better speed and I even ventured to turn on the headlights. The road ran black and straight through the trees, kilometre after kilometre. Once, I remember, we had to crawl with all lights out past an aerodrome, but in general I found I could average about thirty miles an hour.

It was about one o'clock in the morning when we entered Orléans. The town and district were an evacuation area and, as such, naturally filled to capacity, but we hoped to get at least a roof over our heads. We saw the night porter of one of the big hotels - I forget its name—standing in front of its entrance. He disillusioned us immediately.

"There isn't even a chair left here," he said.

We drove on. By the end of another hour both Ackland and I were feeling exhausted. It was by now half-past two o'clock and we were running through lovely open country, with fields where the hay had been freshly cut and stacked. Beside one of these fields we pulled up and, leaving Mrs. Ackland in the back of the car, took to the meadow. The first few minutes in the hay were bliss and the rest of them oblivion.

About four o'clock it began to get light, and at quarter past, refreshing ourselves with a nip of brandy, we started off again through the freshness of a perfect June morning. We passed through the ancient town of Beaugency and presently found ourselves running on the

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of an embankment, with the Loire on our left-hand side. There were numerous sandbanks, some covered with willow trees, in the midst of the stream, and on the other side stretched deep lush meadows reaching up to the hills covered with the vines which produce the delicious wine of Touraine. Wild flowers grew in the utmost profusion, and our road was sometimes for several hundred yards bordered with flaming red poppies.

At Blois we had hoped to drink coffee, but the old town was not yet awake and it was not until we reached Amboise, for we had been diverted to the left bank of the Loire by a military picket, that we were able to breakfast.

We reached Tours at six in the morning. Here we caught up with the first batch of refugees, Parisians for the most part, stampeded by General Weygand's declaration over the radio that France had reached the last quarter of an hour. The town was consequently very full, but, by making unscrupulous use of the fact that I was from the British Embassy, I secured two rooms at the Hôtel Metropole. I then set out to inquire where the French Government was likely to be installed.

Despite the energy and goodwill of the Prefect of Tours I was unable to discover where Clementin wanted to establish his headquarters. The prefecture was a scene of great confusion. Mandel had there set up the Ministry of the Interior, but had not himself arrived. My own Ministry was established in an eighteenth-century building of great beauty, the Institut de France, and here, before the end of the day, I met British journalists who had been sent away from the Army zone several days before.

It may not be relevant to this history, but I help paying a tribute to the integrity, pertinacity and good humour of those men. They had but one defect of communication, an uncertain Press radio service.

New York, so that all messages for London had to be despatched by way of that city at great expense. Of news—which is the breath of their nostrils and the blood in their veins—there was none of the moment, and they had to sit about watching the various Paris officials arriving fitfully and in various stages of peevish exhaustion, merely to add apparently to the confusion already existing. They took as their headquarters a small café, where they consumed innumerable glasses of the treacherous red wine of Chinon, so innocent and yet so deadly.

I set forth with Ackland in the early afternoon to find the château allotted to the Ambassador. We discovered it eventually at Cleret, hidden away in a forest ten miles or so beyond the old town of Luynes. The British military police, evacuated from Paris, had already installed themselves in the stables and out-buildings. A moat ran all round the château, which had last been rebuilt, I judged, about the middle of the eighteenth century. The formal pleasure garden was neatly planted with vegetables. The Ambassador was hourly expected, but had not yet arrived. In the meantime the military police, smart as Guardsmen, moved round the château or sat fishing in the moat. I asked one of them if he had caught anything.

"Nothing," he grunted, "not even a small Bass."

It was not until the evening of the second day that I learned that the French Prime Minister and his personal staff were to establish themselves in the Château of Montrichard on the Cher, some fifty kilometres from Tours. By this time I had an office—namely a fourth share in a deal table stolen from one of the local municipal councillors. The remaining three corners were occupied by three cheerful British censors.

My chief impression throughout those days was *one* of tedious resignation. The German advance to be regarded more as a natural process, an act of God, than as a military disaster. I be

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at me on all sides that fatal whisper which was to become the litany of the high priests of surrender: France had sinned and must therefore suffer. Unforunately it was already obvious that the suffering would be borne mainly by the innocent. The single wide bridge across the Loire, for Tours stands wholly on the left bank of that river, was thronged day and night with the refugees. They were chorus and background to the tragedy. I understood now why our armies had been so hampered in their manœuvres up in the north and appreciated the pitiless ingenuity of the ignoble Hun, who had stampeded the helpless people of France on to the roads and harried them from town to town with fire and massacre.

For fear of air raids, no one who could help it remained in the city. So great, however, was the press of the refugees that the town was always packed, for however fast those in front moved on towards the south, those behind filled up their places.

The railway station in Tours will always live in my memory. The refugees, women and children for the most part, with here and there an old man, lay helpless under the great glass roof, most of them penniless, with no one to help them. Sheer compassion and hot anger at the weary indifference of the authorities drove me into a baker's shop, where I bought up his entire stock of those crescent-shaped loaves, almost of the consistence of puff pastry, which the French eat every morning with their coffee. These I distributed to the children but they were pitifully inadequate, for it needed a miracle to feed that multitude. One thing I was sure of, for most of these children, starving though they were, for most of them had not eaten for twenty hours and some not for forty-eight hours, failed to me as they took the proffered food. There was a rendezvous with Henry Cheriton.

His face was grave.

"Italy," he said.

"What of it?" I demanded. "She declared war yesterday, didn't she?"

He nodded and drew me aside.

"There is a sequel," he said. "Our bombers have been turned back."

For the moment I did not understand what he meant.

"You mean that the Italian defence was successful?"

He shook his head.

"They had no need of a defence," he answered.

"There has been another of those incredible mistakes which Clementin found it necessary to denounce when the French armies fell back from the Meuse—obstruction at the French aerodromes, so that our Hampdens were unable to take off when they landed to refuel on their way to Milan. But keep that under your hat."

I made no comment, for I had no words.

"But here is better news," continued Henry—he sank his voice to a whisper, for we were on the terrace of the principal café, the Univers—"the Prime Minister is coming over to-morrow. Any word from Colonel Granby?"

"No," I answered.

It was then that I gave way almost to panic, especially when Cheriton added:

"Paris was declared an open city two hours ago."

"That must be the end," I managed to say.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"All now depends on Algernon Woodstock."

That was true, but it depended more immediately upon Granby. Where could he be? And why had I not heard from him?

"I must telephone to Paris," I said.

Henry shook his head.

"The wires to Paris are all cut. And the Germans will be there by to-night."

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ed at my watch. It was two in the afternoon.
an instant decision.
must go back," I said. "Something must have
ned to Granby."
don't see what you could do in Paris."
must find out what has happened to Granby. It
essential to get the evidence he is collecting for the
e Minister."

walked over to my car, which was standing on the
er side of the street where Ackland had parked it.
'Ackland must carry on," I said over my shoulder.
Cheriton nodded.

"Good luck, old boy."
I had already let in the clutch.
If the drive down had been difficult, my return to
Paris was a nightmare. After I had crossed the bridge
—they were, I remember, putting a tank into position
to defend one end of it and a 75 at the other—I found
myself jammed in a throng of refugee cars. They were
of all sizes and shapes and all of them packed with
people and belongings. Suitcases were tied on the
running-boards; people were even lying on the wings
of some cars when there was no room for them inside.
There were packages of every conceivable description:
perambulators, birdcages, a coop with some live hens
in it, a tin bath roughly covered with blue-and-white
check cloth, a pale-faced child clutching a tin model
aeroplane, a young man without a collar, but with a
bottle of champagne in his hand. All the cars had
mattresses on their roofs as a protection against machine-
gunning from the air, and also presumably to provide
something on which to lie if it proved impossible, as I
did in nine cases out of ten, to obtain shelter for the
night.

Over the mattresses were spread branches of tree
beech and oak for the most part, the leaves already
wilting in the heat and dust. Thus inadequate

camouflaged the cars looked like some ghastly parody of a Palm Sunday procession.

I should never have got through that appalling traffic if it had not been for the astonishing advent of an army lorry, moving in the same direction as myself. It was full of soldiers and wreathed with crimson ramblers. Every soldier had a blossom stuck in his hat and in the muzzle of his rifle, and it was going inwards against the traffic. The men in it were singing. They looked like soldiers going to the wars. I wondered if they would get there in time.

I followed in the wake of the lorry, which carved its way through the press.

I turned off the main road at Amboise and made a big detour through Chambord. I missed Orléans and rejoined the main road to Paris at Etampes. Here I considered the problem of my R.A.F. number plates. If the Hun were in Paris, they would be an immediate passport to a prison camp. If I took them off, I might not be able to get any petrol.

The problem solved itself when the car suddenly ran dry a few kilometres north of Longjumeau.

I was now in the suburbs of Paris, five kilometres from the Porte d'Orléans. The road was deserted. A cluster of petrol pumps a few yards to my right bore an inscription stating them to be empty. Dusk was falling. I approached the house. It was shuttered and deserted. I moved round to the back and there I saw him—a young man in dirty overalls, bending over a motor-bicycle which was propped upon its stand. He was doing something to its carburettor.

"Five thousand francs for that bicycle," I said.

Without straightening up he turned his head.

"I wouldn't take twenty thousand," he said.

I argued with him for five minutes. He had no where he would go with his precious bicycle. I merely proposing to join the endless stream

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wanderers who would have done infinitely better
n where they were. He was blind and deaf,
e stupidity of a frightened horse.
sorry," I said at last, "but I must have that
," and hit him as hard as I could on the point of
w.

was a foul thing to do, but my need was desperate.
ollapsed in the roadway, knocked out, I reckoned,
at least a minute. His overalls had a zip fastener
ning down the whole length of their front. I pulled
tag and dragged them off. I scrambled into them
d turned my attention to the bicycle. The man had
een putting a jet back into the carburettor. This I
inserted, keeping a wary eye on my victim. He
either moved nor stirred. I left him lying up against
the fence of what I thought was his little house, one of
several in a row.

I kicked the starter and dashed off in the direction of
Paris.

There was a solitary policeman in the middle of the
Porte d'Orléans. He made to stop me, but I paid him
no heed.

I passed cafés with stacked chairs on their terraces.
I saw no one in the streets, except an old priest, stand-
ing outside the Eglise St. Pierre, who did not lift his
eyes as I went past. Here I turned to the left and ran
down the Avenue de Maine, skirting the Gare Mont-
parnasse, in which I noticed there were many trains
standing but no sign of life. I continued down the
equally deserted Rue de Rennes.

It was then, in the midst of this strange solitude, that
I caught sight of my first Germans. I was by the
time level with the Café des Deux Magots at the corner
of the Boulevard St. Germain. There were half a dozen
of them in steel helmets, seated outside the café, their
tank drawn up for all the world like a private car
the edge of the road. They were drinking beer and

by a waiter with a flapping white apron. They took no notice of me, and I turned, crossed the Place St. Germain, and, leaving the old Abbey of Cluny on my right, ran sharp left into the Rue Jacob.

I had but one idea in my mind—to get to Réhmy's headquarters in the little street off the Rue St. Dominique. This was not the most direct way, but I felt that I should do well to avoid the main boulevards. The Germans could only have just entered the city and would still be keeping to the principal arteries.

Presently I found myself in the little street behind the Ministry of Public Works. It was nearly dark when I stopped my engine opposite the door of the tall black house. The clatter of the bicycle died away and a dreadful silence succeeded it.

I climbed from the saddle and stood a moment stiff and tired by the machine. I could hear my own heart beating.

I do not think I shall ever forget that first poignant moment in the conquered city—the city of barricades, surrendered without a blow; the city of light, whose lamps were all put out; the city whose people lived with such pleasant candour in her streets where I had, in the last quarter of an hour, seen only a group of German soldiers drinking beer and a priest beside his church.

I pushed the bicycle into the shadow of a tiny passage not more than three feet wide. Poor though it was, it might prove my only means of transport and I had no wish to have it stolen.

I thrust open the door and walked up the uncarpeted stairs. Réhmy's office was on the first floor. On the landing a man was lying. He was in field grey and a steel helmet had rolled a pace or two away. I looked down at him with a swift sense of calamity. The man had been shot through the head.

I stepped over the body. The door of Réhmy's office was open.

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Two more Germans, one in a leather jerkin with a steel-lined motor-cyclist's hat on his head, lay across the threshold. There was a stench of burnt cordite in the air.

I stepped over them and into the room. Réhmy was lying across his desk. An automatic was in his hand. A thin line of blood lay across his white forehead and ended in his close-clipped moustache. Beside him a fourth German lay in a crumpled heap on the floor. Réhmy's eyes were as still and as dull as pebbles. He was quite dead.

"Hands up, you," came a voice in German. I swung round.

A German *Feldwebel* was framed in the doorway. His large Mauser was pointed straight at my heart.

CHAPTER XIX

DEATH OF A HERO

My first impulse, as I faced the German sergeant, was to thank heaven that there was nothing on me to prove my identity. I had left my passport with its diplomatic visa behind me in Tours, while the motor-cycle on which I had arrived at the headquarters of the *Deuxième Bureau* had, as you know, been stolen, and its number plates would merely refer my captors to its owner.

I glanced over my shoulder and took a last look at the tragic figure lying across his desk. General Etienne Réhmy had come to the end of his long journey. He had served France for forty years, had seen her victorious and now, in the bitter hour of her defeat, he had died for her, as I think he would have chosen to die.

The *Feldwebel* noticed the direction of my glance.

"That swine," he said, "killed four of my men. I wish to Christ we could have taken him alive. He would have paid for it then in full."

It was a German tribute to bravery and I made no answer. The mind of the Nazi was all of a piece. These were the men who had invented total war, who had ripped the bodies of defenceless refugees with machine-gun bullets from the air or blasted them with high-explosive bombs, murdered our seamen, taken old men or women as hostages, taught their children to inform on their parents, and piled up in a few years a greater sum of human misery than whole centuries of active tyranny or selfish indifference had wrought in the long martyrdom of man. It was only fitting that they should insult a brave man who had died for his country.

Drawn up beside the pavement outside was what I

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 first thought to be a light tank with its visors and roof open. I perceived, however, that it was, in fact, the German equivalent of our Bren-gun carrier. Two men, one in shirt-sleeves, were tinkering with the engine. Two more were standing by.

"Halt," cried the German sergeant.
 We halted.

"What's the matter here, Franz?"
 The man in shirt-sleeves straightened himself up and clicked to attention.

"Can't get the ruddy thing to go, Sergeant," he said.
 "I ran it here from the garage up the street, where I filled up as you told me, and now it has gone dead."

"Sabotage," said the other man. "There's something in the petrol."

The sergeant thought for a moment. Then he ordered two men back to the garage.

"Fetch the proprietor," he said.

"Beg pardon, Sergeant," said one of the mechanics.
 "There isn't anyone about. We had to break the lock of the petrol pump to get the gas."

"Do as you're told," said the sergeant sharply. "and search the place."

The two men walked off, while the mechanics continued their operations without success. One of them took the carburettor out of the engine and poured a little of the petrol on to the pavement. He dropped a match on it. A faint blue flame flickered for a moment and then went out.

"As I thought, Sergeant," he said. "There's nothing in the petrol."

The two men despatched to collect the proprietor returned. They were unaccompanied.

"No one there, Sergeant, but I found this on one of the pumps."

He handed the sergeant a square of cardboard attached to it. The sergeant held it

it so that the faint light of the fast-dying day should fall on its surface. I read it over his shoulder.

"*Pas d'eau*" was written in large letters across it, the usual notice hung on the radiator of a car in dock to indicate that the radiator has been drained. The sergeant turned the card over. On the other side was written, "*Trop d'eau, sale Boche.*"

"What's this?" roared the sergeant.

"Too much water, dirty Boche," I translated, too pleased with what the French garage proprietor had done for his country to remember my position. The sergeant struck me a back-hander across the mouth.

"Hold your tongue," he said savagely.

There was a salt taste in my mouth. Blood was coming from the inside of my upper lip where it had been forced against my teeth.

"You two stand by," ordered the sergeant. "I shall march this fellow to headquarters. If a vehicle passes get a tow. Otherwise I'll send you someone from the Crillon."

"At your orders, Sergeant," said the man in shirt-sleeves. "But where is the Crillon?"

"Place de la Concorde," said the sergeant. "That's where we park for the night. Forward, quick march."

Presently I found myself crossing the Quai Voltaire between my two German guards and making for the Pont du Carrousel. In front of me across the river ran the long line of the Louvre and to the left of it the palings of the gardens enclosing the Tuileries. As we reached the Quai Voltaire, I heard behind me and a bit to the left the unmistakable note of my motor-bicycle chugging wheezily away into the darkness. Someone, apparently, had found the poor waif and impounded it.

Across the Pont du Carrousel we marched, through the archway into the precincts of the Louvre, past the monument to Gambetta and into the Rue de Rivoli. The long street was utterly silent. The shops under the arcade were shuttered. Paris was, in fact, a dead city

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there was no one to be seen. No, that is not true. There was one, a woman in golden armour on a gilded horse standing in the Place de Rivoli, the maid of honour, who had once saved France, and I saw, too, the old fiery lawyer on his monument behind us, who had pulled France from disaster four hundred years later. Would these some day be a third statue in that place to Clementine?

Those who know Paris will realise that we were not going the shortest way to the Crillon. I soon discovered why. The sergeant kept glancing up at the houses and reading the names of the lateral streets as we reached them. It was evident that he did not know his way about. I saw no reason to help him. Giant despair had me in his grip and I was in no hurry to reach our destination. The best I could hope for was a firing squad, the worst a concentration camp.

I tried hard to compose my mind. To do so I knew was my only hope, and a very slim one at that, but my brain just wouldn't work. I was dog-tired and could not concentrate. All I could remember was the dead calm face of General Réhmy lying across his desk in the Rue Dominique.

At the corner of the Rue Castiglione the sergeant paused. It was now quite dark. I could just make him out, a dim figure two yards away from me. He was interrogating someone whom I could not see at all. "Where is the Crillon?" he was demanding in broken French.

The reply came back in the purest German. "My German brothers! The first I have seen in Paris. Heil Hitler! Siegheil! Siegheil!"

The unknown in front was evidently beside himself with excitement.

"Now then," said the sergeant gruffly, "who are you?"

"Schumann, Franz, of the Gestapo," came the

answer out of the darkness. "Do not fear. I will lead you. This is at last the day! Heil Hitler!"

"Can you take us to the Crillon?"

"Certainly. It is only a step, a few hundred yards. This way, please, Herr Sergeant. You are the first Germans I have seen. But I have told you that already? You must drink with me, my German brothers. It is my privilege. It is an honour that I promise myself. The first of my countrymen, I said, to enter this town as victors shall drink with me."

"That is very kind of you, Herr Schumann," began the sergeant, "but we have a prisoner here and no time to lose."

"Nonsense, my friend. That won't do at all. Surely you can spare ten minutes? Who is your prisoner? One of these dumb Frenchmen? There will be time enough to deal with him."

I could not see the man who was speaking. He was no more than a shadow in the darkness.

"You must certainly drink with me," continued the stranger. "Champagne of the best and at my expense."

The sergeant laughed.

"I imagine that we shall take what we need without much expense," he responded.

"Take care, comrade," retorted the other. "You have not perhaps had your orders yet. But we of the Gestapo know what they will be. We are to handle these Frenchmen softly for the moment. You are all to be little gentlemen and pay your way—all in nice clean German marks printed in Berlin."

The little man laughed.

"Painless pillage," he continued. "You will find that these French shopkeepers will be unable to resist a kind German soldier with a pocket-book. That, my friend, is a better weapon than your pistol. So come with me, I beg. There is a little café round the corner where you shall drink with me."

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could do with a drink," muttered one of my
t in his throat.
Five minutes then," said the sergeant.

"This way, comrades!"
The little man's footsteps pattered along the pavement
front of us. He turned right and walked a short
distance up the Rue Castiglione and turned into the
Rue du Mont Thabor. We were walking past the
Ministry in which I had served for a few brief weeks.
It rose, tall, dark and silent on our left hand. Our
footsteps echoed in the narrow street. At the junction
with the Rue Cambon we turned right. I knew now
where we were going. The wine bar of the King
Charles was just in front of us.

Our guide, who had been silent, broke again into his
nervous chatter as he pulled aside the black-out curtain.
"Here we are. Here we are. Sit down, all of you.
Make yourselves comfortable. We will drink to the
Führer."

He shouted to the woman behind the bar.
"Three bottles of your best champagne."
I could see the little man now. He was in a ready-
made suit with an olive-green stripe in it. He had a
swastika armlet on his left arm, but his face was un-
mistakable.

It was Colonel Granby.
He took not the slightest notice of me, beyond saying
"Where will you put the prisoner, Herr Feldwebel?
Over there in that corner, I suggest. There is
danger of his getting away. I know this place well.
is our headquarters in Paris. This is the only d-
God, he looks like an Englishman."

"He is an Englishman."
Granby came up to me.
"An Englishman," he breathed and spat on the
"God punish England," he continued. "But he
ing. The Führer has promised that w

salute the swastika in the Palace of Buckingham in six weeks from now. England will go the way of France. England next—and afterwards, the world.”

He broke off.

“Where is that champagne?” he shouted. “Are we to be here all night?”

The woman came forward. She said nothing as she set down the four tall glasses—there was not one for me, I noticed—and then went back to the bar. A moment later came a sound that had always caused me to rejoice but was now a hollow mockery. It was that of a champagne cork leaving the bottle.

The woman was back again now and pouring out the wine. When the glasses were full, Granby took his in his left hand. He rose to his feet, thrust out his right arm in a Nazi salute, and shouted:

“Heil Hitler! Heil der Führer! No heeltaps, gentlemen.”

My escort and the sergeant clicked their heels. They lifted their glasses and their heads went back.

They drained their glasses at a gulp.

I shall never forget what followed. I was facing the sergeant. I saw first the look in his eyes, a gleam of doubt, a flash of astonishment, and then a fixed stare of panic. His hand wavered for an instant towards his pistol, but jerked upwards to his throat. He stood swaying on his feet and then suddenly he crashed. The man next to him also went down, his mouth twisted in an unnatural grin, while the third German gave a choking gasp and fell across the table.

All this happened swiftly and in a horrible silence, broken only by a choking and sighing from the stricken men. The sergeant lay at my feet. The fingers of his left hand opened and closed twice and then remained rigid.

“Poison,” I gasped.

“Turn out the lights,” said Granby.

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by one the lights in the wine parlour were extinguished, all but a faint bulb behind the bar. My mind was filled with an instinctive and loathing protest against what I had seen. Granby took no notice, but said sharply:

"Bear a hand, and quickly too. We must get them away."

I bent down and grasped the ankles of the dead sergeant. The woman was holding aside the curtain which covered a doorway behind the bar. Her mouth was a thin red line and her eyes were blazing.

"Down there," she said. "It's only a step or two." She flashed a torch and held it low. It illuminated half a dozen stone steps and the black mouth of a cellar.

Granby and I descended the steps.

"Poison," I said again.

"Cyanide," Granby snapped. "It is a merciful death. One that I keep for myself. It is sometimes necessary to die quickly in our service."

I said nothing, but he felt the protest still alive, in me.

"Not a soldier's weapon," Granby continued, as we laid down our burden in a corner of the cellar, "but these men are not soldiers. They are the Gestapo vermin who follow the German armies or stay at home to break women's hearts and the spirits of brave men. Not that I would have hesitated whatever their rank and there is only one way to fight the gangster: kill him before he kills you. For God's sake," he went enraged by my stubborn face, "have you no memory. The boldest and best of these men—for at least it takes courage to man an aeroplane or a submarine in order to murder our seamen in cold blood; shoot down our men as they fall in their parachutes; drive women and children on to the roads and keep them moving with their machine-guns. Do you blame me for po-

these lesser rats before they can get a chance of driving me to poison myself?"

We completed our work in silence, broken only by brief orders from Granby, which I obeyed like a man in a dream.

I have since wondered many times whether Granby was right. My intelligence approves of what he did. He had accepted the only possible consequences of total war, with all its sub-human and bestial implications. Certainly I do not blame him. The moralist who is able in full security to take long views may urge that to win a war by methods which tar victor and vanquished with the same foul brush is to lose it in the finer sense. But these are not matters for dispute in the heat of the day. We had to kill those men or be killed ourselves and lose our mission. I feel that I should applaud in Granby a moral courage higher than my own. And yet——

I still think of that last night in Paris with a horror which will stay with me till the day I die.

The woman was waiting for us at the head of the stairs when we returned from our third journey to the cellar and back again. She looked at me as we passed.

"I have just heard that my husband is wounded and missing," she said.

That was how she saw the business. So what need had we for further argument?

"Safely stowed," muttered Granby, as he shut the cellar door. "And now, Madam, where is your brother?"

She had extinguished the last light in the bar and we were in total darkness. Her torch gleamed a moment and I heard the sound of a door opening cautiously. Then I saw her in vague outline against the night.

"Waiting with the taxi," she said. "I will get my things and meet you in the courtyard."

We passed through into a small enclosure, from which

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rose the rank smell of a Paris drain. There we presently joined by the woman carrying a small case and a bundle girt with straps. We crossed the courtyard and passed through a narrow passage some thirty feet long, to find a taxi drawn up on the other side of the road.

Without a word the three of us climbed into the back. The driver let in his clutch and off we went. He drove very slowly, taking a circuitous route and keeping, as far as he could, to side streets. When we had to cross a main artery, the driver would stop, get out of the taxi, and reconnoitre swiftly before running across.

We crossed the Seine at the Pont d'Austerlitz near the Gare de Lyon. Here we were stopped by a French policeman, who had as his companion a German soldier bristling with bombs and carrying a large Mauser. I felt the butt of a smaller edition of the same weapon thrust suddenly into my hand.

"Watch the Hun," whispered Granby, "and shoot first."

The driver was explaining that he was going home with his sister and two cousins. He produced papers showing that he lived in the Bicetre quarter.

"I shall have to hurry," said the driver, "because of the curfew."

"You will," answered the German, speaking in tolerable French. "You've only got another ten minutes."

It was not until we had reached the outskirts of Paris and found ourselves once more on the Route d'Orléans that Granby spoke again.

"The Germans only entered the city this evening he said. 'They haven't organised themselves yet they're still letting people out. I think they want many to go as possible. They all help to jam the roads.'"

We had now joined the familiar convoy of vehicles packed with Parisians running away, and our progress was desperately slow.

"How on earth did you work this miracle?" I asked.

Granby did not answer at once. I looked at him. His face shone pale in the gloom.

"I went round to the Rue Dominique an hour ago," he said. "I was too late."

He stopped suddenly.

I could not see his face, but his voice had broken. I knew then, without seeing, that the tears were running down his cheeks.

After a short silence, he continued:

"It was the way Etienne would have chosen," he said. "I begged him earlier in the day to come south with me. But he refused. I had planned to travel by air, but that arrangement broke down."

"You mean that there wasn't an aeroplane?"

"There were dozens of aeroplanes, all at Villacoublay. But none of them would take off."

"How do you mean?"

"They wouldn't take off because Chiappe was appointed Governor of Paris yesterday morning. Chiappe, as you know, is a hundred per cent Fifth Columnist. His first order was to prohibit any plane from leaving the ground. That order was obeyed. The man who was going to fly me would, I think, have done so. He was a young airman with the Croix de Guerre, but the commandant of the aerodrome put him under arrest, and if I hadn't looked pretty slippery and legged it into a wood on the outskirts of the aerodrome, I should probably have been arrested too. It took me some time to make my way back to Paris. I had to do the journey on foot. I reached the city about two hours ago. I went at once to the Rue Dominique to get into touch with Réhmy. As I came up the street I saw a German tank standing at the door of his office. There were half a dozen men on the pavement. The tank drove away, but the men entered the building. I knew what that meant. Etienne Réhmy was No. 1 on the German black

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I ran up the street and heard the shots. It was over before I could reach the door. So I took refuge in a room downstairs. Then I heard a motor-bicycle, and somebody else came into the house. I did not know who it was till I saw you come down under arrest."

"And then?"

"Then I did some quick thinking. I assumed, of course, that they would be taking you away in the tank. So it was obviously no good me trying to follow on foot. I accordingly slipped across to where you had parked the motor-bicycle. There I overheard the little comedy of the water in the petrol and the armoured vehicle. That garagist—and please God there are thousands like him—saved the whole situation, for, when I realised that you were all going to walk to the Crillon, I had time to stage my little ambushade. I made off on your bicycle to the King Charles, explained things to Madame Masson, who is an old friend, not to say a colleague, of mine. She fixed things for me in no time and I was able to slip on the Nazi armlet and intercept you with a lifelike impersonation of one of Himmler's boys. You know the rest."

"And the dossier?" I asked, staring ahead into the living gloom of the long road.

Granby patted his chest.

"Very near and dear," he answered.

There was a short silence. Then Granby's came softly out of the darkness:

"Tell me, John, how did he look?"

"Very calm," I said. "I think he was smiling he died."

"One of the undefeated," said Granby, and a long time before he spoke again.

CHAPTER XX

IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER

THE hours passed slowly, our fitful talk being interspersed with numberless small incidents, mostly arising out of the inevitable maddening traffic jams which delayed us right through the night. We were one joint or vertebra of a serpent twenty miles long, winding a stricken way from its Paris lair, now in the hands of the enemy, towards a mirage of freedom and comfort in the south.

Dawn found us in Chartres, for we had come by that city in the vain hope that the less direct route would be less crowded.

The refugees of which we formed an unwilling unit were not the patient, weary, mainly peasant folk we had seen on the roads so far, but Parisians, many of them well-to-do, in comfortable cars. But the cars were packed and piled with household possessions, in the midst of which their owners, angry and haggard, sat as best they could.

At the wheel of most of the cars was an unshaven *pater familias*—a nightmare succession of blue chins and tired eyes. He would be driving in shirt-sleeves, with mother-in-law or, in rarer instances, wife and at least one child wedged next to him. In the back, perched on suitcases or bundles and carrying anything from toys to kitchen utensils, would be the rest of the family. The corn in the fields stood almost ripe, and overhead the sky burned a deep blue unflecked by clouds. But the lovely June morning was foul with the fumes of petrol, and human nature was not seen at its best. One incident out of many will suffice. It took place in Chartres, at the end of the great boulevard planted

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young plane trees where in happier days I have
at clay pipes and cast rings over the necks of wine
les at one or other of the many booths which seem
manently to line it. Two cars approached a petrol
up simultaneously. Neither driver would give way
the other, and the man who had been beaten in the
ce by a short bonnet deliberately rammed his rival.
Two suitcases were knocked off the running-board, one
f which burst open and scattered its contents, under-
clothes for the most part, over the roadway. The drivers
broke into a violent *engueulade* and presently came to
blows. Whereupon their wives set up a shrill scream-
ing and sought to part them. The only result was to
start another and more sanguinary battle between the
two women. It seemed that murder would be done
when one of them got hold of a bottle and began to lay
about her. No one, not even the owner of the petrol
pump, made an attempt to interfere, and the sound
of the conflict followed us as we moved onwards in the
queue.

Over the wide plain of the Neauce, one of the chief
granaries of France, we crawled. According to Granby's
latest information, Algernon Woodstock was due to
meet the French Cabinet that afternoon at Briard. I
shall not attempt to convey the heat and exasperation
of that dreadful journey. As the minutes and hours
went by, I began to think it would never end. Time
moved fast when we thought of the little that remained
but the minutes themselves seemed interminable.

A series of small, sharp pictures rise up again
memory as I write. The fight at the petrol pump
Chartres I have already described. I remember a
an old woman whom I saw leaning against the
memorial in some village of which I forget the name.
She was alone, and as we passed her in second gear
heard her repeating over and over again like some
the Litany:

"Everything has gone, everything—yes, everything."

I remember, too, an old man walking with two sticks, a large pack on his back, blowing out his cheeks at every step which he took and looking neither to right nor left, and the distorted face of an innkeeper pouring wine at a table set outside his house by the roadside, who cried in agony: "But we cannot surrender—not Villebois, not the defender of Verdun."

Then there was the strange incongruity of old things that still went on quite uselessly now, from sheer inertia, as when at some larger town, Blois I fancy, but my memory is uncertain, a smart young thing, wearing an orange make-up, succeeded in selling Granby a paper emblem in aid of the French Red Cross.

La belle et douce France was falling to pieces before my eyes, because "it first did help to wound itself." That was the tragic truth of the matter. She was falling because her leaders had been blind, selfish, faint-hearted, and concerned to the last with old shibboleths, personal antipathies, or the party reflex. How many times, I reflected, as we drove along in silence, save for an occasional quickly suppressed sob from the woman of the King Charles, have I not heard in the last days talk such as this:

"You can't trust X; he's a Communist."

"Y?"

"My dear man, he has no party behind him."

"Z?"

"He's a Freemason."

"A?"

"He's a Jew."

"B?"

"He has just invested a million, they say, in South America."

French Republicanism had failed, for the moment, to bear the strain of total war. But even with this evidence of disaster all about me, I never for a moment doubted of France and her people. This was a terrible but a

passing weakness. There was still hope. Nor did I even yet despair of retrieving the situation. Clementin was still Prime Minister. Clementin would never lend himself to panic or surrender.

I said as much to Granby.

"I hope not," he said, "but Clementin is not the Tiger. He has taken everything on his shoulders. But can he carry the weight of it? He is half crazy for lack of sleep and Maryse Bertrand will give him no rest. She has won the first, perhaps the most decisive move in her campaign."

I waited.

"Ever heard of General de Gaulle?" continued Granby.

"No."

"Not only a brilliant soldier, but a born leader—the sort of man nobody hears about till the worst happens. I can see that man fighting for France with a price on his head. Five years ago he told exactly how this war would go. He advocated, and always has, the complete mechanisation of the French Army, and only a few months ago he wrote a memorandum which Gamelin and the French General Staff consigned to the wastepaper basket. He dared to be a heretic. He did not believe in the Maginot Line, and talked of open warfare when the pundits were thinking in terms of siege and sortie. Do you know where I found him? In Clementin's office at the Elysée. His master had sent for him at last and was prepared to listen. He told me that Clementin, on his urgent advice, had decided to move the Government to St. Nazaire or Nantes in Brittany. From there, as he maintained, the struggle could be continued or the French armies, if necessary, evacuated. The General was radiant. I asked him why he was not already at military headquarters to get things ready. He looked at me for a moment. Then he said: 'I remain by his side till he moves.' I understood what he meant.

De Gaulle was taking no risks. He had moved his desk into the P.M.'s own room and wasn't letting him out of his sight."

"And then?" I prompted.

"At that very moment," continued Granby, "Clementin came into the room. Ever been there, John?"

"No," I answered.

"It's an L-shaped room," went on Granby, "and we were in the shorter arm. As Clementin came round the corner I heard a patter of high heels behind him and the voice of Maryse Bertrand. Clementin hesitated a moment and turned back. I saw de Gaulle turn red, then pale. After that we both listened. She talked to Clementin for half an hour, out of earshot, but after the first ten minutes we knew it was hopeless. Then she went away and Clementin came round the corner. He looked like a man walking in his sleep. 'It is decided,' he said to de Gaulle. 'We shall go to Tours and then, perhaps to Bordeaux.' De Gaulle said nothing to me. I don't think he even realised I was there."

"How did she persuade Clementin to change his mind?" I wondered.

I had to repeat the question, which was drowned by a long, sharp whistle coming, it seemed, from a cyclist near at hand.

Granby sighed wearily.

"Does it matter?" he answered. "You know how Maryse can talk. She has been intimate with Clementin for many years. He trusts her implicitly and respects her political judgment."

Granby was still speaking when there came a shout from our driver. The taxi gave a lurch. There came a crash. A huge grey camouflaged lorry loomed above us and our taxi rolled on to its side.

It was a stout willow which saved us. Otherwise we should have rolled down the bank, twenty feet or more, into one of the lush meadows bordering our route. I

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covered this as soon as I had succeeded in climbing
from the wreckage of the taxi.

The lorry had been moving in the opposite direction
from our own, and we were one of a hundred cars
jammed in the long stream on the narrow road running
along the embankment beside the Loire. We had been
literally pushed from the road. The taxi man was
swearing. The woman from the King Charles was
crying from sheer exhaustion and Granby was holding
his ankle. With his free hand, on which the thumbnail
was turning blue, he thrust an envelope into my hand.
"Get away," he said urgently. "I will meet you in
Briard if I can make it. I am going to hold this fellow
up."

I was about to protest when I saw the reason for this
curt order. Leaning from the driving-seat of the lorry
was a man in a dirty khaki uniform topped by a French
tin hat. I am never likely to forget his ugly face. It
was the man who had thrust the cigarette into my
nostril.

I slipped to the bottom of the bank and fell sprawling
into a bed of nettles. I heard a crack like a big limb
breaking from a tree in a storm. There came another
Then a low roaring sound and a medley of voices:
twisted round, to see bright flames bursting from the
petrol tank of the lorry and the small figure of Granby
thrusting something into the breast pocket of his coat
something from which a thin wisp, almost immediately
extinguished, of blue smoke was rising.

It was like a clear-cut shot in a good film. It
succeeded by another equally so and provided with
sound accompaniment, as the driver of the lorry leapt
shrieking horribly, from his seat. A French
automatic was in his hand. His uniform was lapped
fire. His face was that of a man clutching by a
and an agony more than mortal. He crashed into
grass of the bank and began rolling down towards

I stayed not his coming, but ran blindly away in the direction of the hills about half a mile away.

I did not pause till I got into the comparative shelter of some young vines in their early summer foliage. There I lay down a moment and looked back. The lorry was burning furiously and great clouds of smoke were rising from it. From where I was I could hear no voices. The only sound was that of electric hooters screaming all down the line of stationary cars, whose forward progress was blocked by the flaming lorry. Granby had certainly succeeded in creating a diversion.

The vineyard came to an end in a low wall holding up a bank which formed the boundary of a field. I climbed the bank and saw the grey walls of a substantial farm with outbuildings not a hundred yards away. I walked cautiously towards the farm. I was unshaven and dirty—not the sort of man to inspire confidence. But I carried plenty of money, an asset at all times.

My presence was announced by a large and strident cock, echoed by his numerous and vocal hens, and presently I found myself engaged in the purchase of a lady's bicycle, vintage 1906 or thereabouts—a good year for claret. The farmer's wife who sold it to me was carrying on the farm in the absence of her husband with the Army, and she let me have it for the trifling figure of two thousand francs. I was in no mood to argue, but paid up quickly, and was soon trying to memorise from her instructions the best way to Briard, avoiding all main routes. To do this, she explained, it was necessary to cross the Loire either by the bridge at Amboise or by that of Tours or by the *bac* three kilometres away. I decided immediately for the *bac*, a ferry passing over the river by cable.

I bought from her also some dried sausage and bread and set out, making a wide circle to the north to avoid the spot where the lorry had come to grief. I crossed the main road between the ranked cars and farm

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les, choosing a place where the driver of an over-
ed Citroën was asleep across the driving-wheel,
less of the electric horns which were screaming
gedly down the endless line. Evidently the lorry was
l blocking the road, and I could distinguish faintly in
e middle distance the plume of dark smoke still rising
om its remains. I followed a narrow stony track—I
an hardly call it a road—which twisted down towards
he river bank. There it ended in a stout wooden
landing-stage, to which a big flat-bottomed punt, almost
a small barge, was attached. It was worked by an old
man, to whom I paid my fare. The only other pas-
sengers were a thin woman, neatly dressed in black,
carrying a basket, and two small, red-cheeked children,
who looked at me with great curiosity, but said
nothing.

Arrived at the other side, I joined another stream of
traffic, as dense as that on the farther bank and composed
of the same kind of vehicles with the same kind of people
in them. On a bicycle, even on so ramshackle a machine
as mine, I found I could move half as fast again as the
cars. For a little time I kept company with a youngish
man, also on a bicycle, to the handlebars of which was
attached a cage containing a canary. The bird sang
with piercing sweetness throughout our short journey of
perhaps a mile together. The young man was a *reformé*
he told me, that is, one rejected on medical grounds from
service in the Army. He was employed in a Paris bar
which had abruptly closed its doors the day before.
was, he said, going to join his mother at Hendaye and
seemed glad of the interruption in his normal life.
cycled a lot, he explained to me, for his health's
mostly at week-ends, in the woods round Paris.
face certainly had a healthy tan, but beneath it
lines graven by more than fatigue and from time to
he coughed distressingly.

We parted company at the first by-road to t

and presently I found myself alone, pushing my ramshackle machine up a steep hill and leaving the sad concourse of refugees below and behind me. I will not describe my journey in detail. I was consumed with but one desire, to reach Briard at all costs and get into touch with the Prime Minister. That, it seemed to me, would not be so difficult. Algernon Woodstock would certainly not be unaccompanied. He would have secretaries with him, not to mention the Ambassador, whom I knew.

I stopped for ten minutes to eat some of the sausage and bread and to examine the contents of Granby's envelope. They consisted, in addition to a photostat copy of the vital two pages of Privet's diary, of a short memorandum headed "MOST SECRET, for the Prime Minister only." It contained, in a series of short numbered paragraphs, written in the terse style urged on all Government departments by Mr. Algernon Woodstock, a succinct exposition—I'm sorry, a short list—of those in the French Cabinet who were against Clementin, with brief notes explaining why they were so and what they hoped to do. There was a shorter list of those who were certain to support him and a final list of doubtfuls.

The supporters and the doubtfuls added together made up eleven names, Clementin included.

This memorandum was the essence of all that the dead Réhmy and the live Granby had gleaned during the previous three weeks, and its sum-total showed clearly one thing. Only a miracle could save France. And yet . . .

Even then I had hope. After all I had seen, I could not believe, as I still do not believe, that France was broken or that France as a nation was finished. I was thinking, not of the cars crowded with fleeing Parisians, men and women of the bourgeoisie, with money and possessions to lose, but of the patient women in *wir* straw hats, toiling in the fields while their men wore

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izon blue and went towards the battle in a lorry
eathed in roses.

I pressed on throughout that afternoon. I forget how
any times I lost my way, but I kept resolutely to the
ide roads and tracks. I was not going to tread the
broad highway—not with Privet and his men about.
I planned to arrive at Briard if possible at dusk. Then I
would inquire whether any cars with diplomatic number
plates, the letters C.D., had arrived or traversed the
town. Information of that kind should not be difficult
to get. Someone on a café terrace would surely have
seen such a car, if it had passed.

So I argued, until, eventually, I reached the little
town by a narrow lane bordered—a rare thing in France
—by hedgerows bright with wild roses, honeysuckle,
briony, and old man's beard.

It was about six o'clock in the afternoon when I sat
down at a table on the terrace of the Café Moderne,
bordering the square round which the town was built.
I call it a square, but it was no more than a broadening
of the road which ran roughly from west to east and cut
Briard in half. I ordered some beer and sat back
to relax and decide which of my immediate neighbors
would be the most likely to give me the information I
wanted. The terrace was full. The customers were
entirely civilian, the soldiers being confined to the
itself, whose large room, its windows wide, was
filled, mostly with junior officers. I recollected
there was an order about men in uniform not
allowed to sit outside a café. One other point I
No journalists, French, British, or American, were
seen. This might or might not be of significance.
Ministers had even now begun and that the job
were therefore waiting about outside the closed
the conference room, or else that the secret was
too well kept.

I hoped fervently that the latter was the case.

I drank my beer, looked round for the waiter to order another. Then I had a shock. I found myself staring at the profile of one Jacquart. I recognised the man at once. He was Privet's new Chef de Cabinet, whom I had last seen at the Ministry in Paris.

I realised, too late, the folly of sitting outside the principal café of the town.

I rose hastily to my feet and had at once a piece of bad luck, for, pushing my chair back too sharply, I jogged the elbow of a man behind me, with the result that a large quantity of his *café crème* missed his mouth and hit his chest. My apologies were profuse and abject. But by the time I had secured a waiter, bought my victim another drink and refused to drink myself on the plea of urgent business, it was too late.

Jacquart was on his feet. He gave one look at me and immediately turned away his head. His face had been carefully blank, but I was not deceived. I knew that he had identified me.

I had sense enough not to walk out of the place and thus make it a simple matter for him to follow me. Instead, I threaded my way as fast as I could between the iron tables and made for the interior of the café. I had no very clear idea of what I should do. For one moment I thought of thrusting the envelope into a brass pot near the counter, behind which the proprietor of the café was handing out drinks. The brass pot contained a flowering geranium of a very vivid pink. A quick glance, however, in a mirror, decorated with a pattern of flowers and bullrushes, which took up the whole of one wall of the room, showed me that Jacquart was already on his feet and facing the direction towards which I had moved.

"I want the lavatory," I said to the proprietor.

"*Deux Arret Piere. Un Raphael d'eau de selze. Premiere Etage. Escalier à droite,*" he answered, all in one breath.

I sidled past the bar, pushed open a door panelled with frosted glass, and found myself in a small hall with some stairs, covered with a worn yellow carpet, upon my right hand. I took these two at a time. My first idea was to lock myself in the lavatory and seek escape by the window. A locked door would, might at least, delay Jacquart for enough time to enable me to get away. I reflected, however, as I turned a corner and saw the first-floor landing just ahead of me, that lavatories, and especially French lavatories, do not usually have windows large enough to crawl through unless you happen to be a small child. I therefore abandoned that idea, and on reaching the landing, opened the first door I reached. It was immediately on my left at the top of the stairs. It gave on to a biggish room with a large walnut dressing-table standing in front of a double window. This much I saw before I turned about, put my hand on the key, and locked the door.

"What do you imagine you are doing, Mr. Orford?" came a sleepy voice.

I spun round.

In a wide bed in an alcove to my right hand Maryse Bertrand was lying.

RETREAT FROM VICTORY

THERE was just nothing at all to say. I could only stare, and even that might be open to misconception.

She had raised herself on one elbow and I saw she was wearing a thin dressing-gown of green silk over underclothes of the finest lawn.

I had no time to feel, less to express, dismay, admiration, embarrassment, or any other emotion which might have been appropriate to the occasion. The door handle rattled violently.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Maryse.

"That will be Jacquart," I said in a rapid undertone.

There came a loud thump on the panel. The door quivered, but held.

"Why is he trying to break into my bedroom?" she demanded.

"He is Monsieur Privet's Chef de Cabinet," I reminded her.

"Then why are you avoiding him?" she countered sharply.

Without waiting for my answer, which was as well, since I had not yet thought of one, Maryse Bertrand pushed the bedclothes aside, stood up, slipped her feet into a pair of mules trimmed with down, and approached the door.

"Who's there? What is it? This is Madame Bertrand speaking," she called.

The assault ceased and there was a moment's silence.

Then came a voice beyond the door:

"It is Monsieur Jacquart, Madam. I am looking for . . . for a certain person, and I thought . . . It seemed to me . . ."

"You have mistaken the room," she replied.

"Madam, a thousand apologies."

"Please go away. I am trying to get a little sleep."

"Certainly, Madam. I beg that my apologies be accepted."

Maryse made no answer, and after a moment I heard the footsteps of Jacquart moving away down the landing. Then she turned to me.

"Now what did he want with you?" she asked.

"I haven't the least idea," I responded helplessly.

"Give me credit for a little intelligence," she retorted. "Jacquart would not be pursuing you with such tenacity unless there was a very good reason. What does he want?"

"I haven't the least idea," I repeated stubbornly.

"It wouldn't be that long envelope in your pocket, by any chance?" she wondered.

I clapped my hand to the inner breast pocket of my coat and flushed crimson. The envelope was too large for the pocket and the top of it was plainly visible. She held out her hand.

"May I have it, please?"

"I regret, Madam, but this is not my property."

She looked at me steadily for a moment. Then she moved towards me till by stretching out her arms she could have laid her hands on my shoulders.

"I was under the impression, Mr. Orford," she said softly, "that, as the result of our last meeting, we had parted friends."

The directness of her attack took away my breath. It was a frontal assault. Still I could only stand and stare. She reached out her right hand towards the protruding envelope. At that I pulled myself together, stepped back a pace, and said:

"I must apologise for entering your room, Madam. I will leave it immediately."

your self-control," she continued, as her head emerged from the gown, which fell discreetly into place.

Was this straightforward coquetry or had she realised that I was determined to play my silly game to the end? Not that it mattered. My mind was frantically busy upon the implications of her decision to take me to Clementin. The memorandum prepared for the Prime Minister of Great Britain would scarcely have the same effect on the Prime Minister of France. A great deal of it, perhaps, would be stale news. Clementin must know of the treachery within his gates, whereas Algernon Woodstock, though as shrewd a man as ever propped his feet on the table beside the despatch box, could not be expected to have that detailed knowledge which was contained in the envelope and which had been specially designed to enable him to have all the sad facts at his immediate disposal. Yet what could I do? Leave the room and run straight into Jacquart? True, I was armed. But what good would that do me? I could hardly shoot him down in cold blood, and even if I did, that would bring me no nearer to Algernon Woodstock. I remembered, moreover, those army service lorrymen in the yard.

I decided to fall in with her proposal. She would take me to Clementin. I might then urge him to give the envelope to his English opposite number immediately, and perhaps have speech with Algernon Woodstock himself.

Maryse was standing at the mirror, patting her hair.

"I am ready now," she said. "Be kind enough to unlock the door."

I did so and stood aside. She walked quickly past me. I fell in behind. A figure, darkly silhouetted against the landing window, moved forward as I shut the door behind us.

"This gentleman will see me to my car," said Maryse evenly. "You need wait no longer, Monsieur Jacquart."

"But, Madam," he began.

He did not finish his sentence. Maryse was already going down the staircase. I followed as fast in her wake. I like to think that we left Jacquart gaping, but I did not see his face. In the passage below Maryse turned away from the café, from which a clamour of talk came to us through the glass-panelled door, and moved towards another entrance. I followed at her heels and found myself in the courtyard. Beside the lorries was a camouflaged staff car, a large Renault with a military chauffeur lounging beside it. On catching sight of Maryse he sprang to attention, threw away the cigarette attached to his lower lip, and jumped for the door handle.

"As fast as you can go," said Maryse briefly to the driver.

I sprang in beside her and the big car started with a jerk before I had closed the door.

"I should have been nearer to headquarters," said Maryse, more to herself than to me, "but there were no beds and sleep I had to have."

"*He* has had no sleep," she continued, turning suddenly to me. "He has not had an hour's rest in twenty-four for the last week. It is terrible. He will kill himself under the strain."

I realised that she was speaking of Clementin.

"But it will all be over soon," she added. "Then he can rest."

I wondered what sort of rest she had in mind for the man she was hoping to manoeuvre into a position where he might be forced to eat all his brave words and come to terms with the enemy.

I did not answer her, but concentrated on my coming interview. In a few short sentences I must convey the importance of my evidence and the urgent necessity of putting it before Algernon Woodstock without a moment's delay. It was not going to be easy, and long

near one of its edges. Near this hole was a brand-new hot-water radiator, still without its final coat of paint. It was leaning against the wall and had not yet been put into position. The hole in the wall was a passage for one of the pipes connecting the radiator with the central heating apparatus of the château, which was evidently in process of being modernised.

I got down on my knees and applied my eye to the hole. Then, however, I thought of the passing sentries. I recrossed the room and looked out of the window. The men were marching up and down outside and the head and shoulders of one of them passed the window regularly about once in two minutes. I waited till he had got to the end of his beat. Then I went back to the hole and sat down with my back to the wall, a position which brought my ear to the level of the hole. The Prime Minister was still speaking:

"Despite the break-through at Forges-les-Eaux, I am still of the opinion," he said, "that the tank is not the invincible offensive weapon that Hitler believes it to be. It needs courage and nerve to withstand it, but since when have those elements been lacking in the French Army? There have been gallant instances of enemy tanks held up and destroyed by your own gunners with their seventy-fives. There are hundreds and thousands of brave, devoted, and determined men who look to their leaders and are still ready to respond to an order of the day such as has so often and so proudly issued from the Headquarters of the Armies of France in her hours of destiny.

"I have been asked what contribution the British armies can make to the continued defence of France. General Weygand, like General Gamelin before him, is well aware of our resources by land. More than three hundred and fifty thousand British troops have successfully eluded the clutches of the enemy at Dunkirk, and I think I can justly claim that they are veterans. How

soon, you ask me, will they be re-equipped and capable of taking their place once more in the firing-line? I realise, no one better, that for you this is a vital matter. For until they do so the French Army must bear the brunt unaided. But that, I am afraid, will be the position for some little time. It will be at least two or three months before the British Expeditionary Force can be re-armed and re-equipped. Till then your brave armies must stand alone."

My heart sank at his words. He was telling these men the plain, unvarnished truth. He was seeking to paint a picture that should tell no kind of lie. That, he obviously believed, was the proper line to take. I recalled his words on assuming office, when he had offered the people of Britain nothing but blood and toil and sweat. He was offering these things now to the people of France. But, alas! he was talking not to a nation, full of a fierce pride and determination, which might have accepted them, but to twenty-seven cynics of a French Cabinet which numbered among its ranks an elderly Field-Marshal, with the laurels of twenty-five years ago withered on his brow, committed to surrender, planted there for the purpose by men who feared in their people the very qualities whereby they might yet be saved.

My knowledge of the French governing classes, if you can so describe the men who control the Paris cabinets, led me to feel that he had couched his appeal in the wrong terms.

I could now hear every word that passed, but, for anything I could usefully do, I might have been a thousand miles away. I rose to my feet, crossed the room, and stared out of the window, remembering that I had not seen the sentry's head and shoulders for some time. The men were no longer marching up and down, but were both standing some distance away, leaning on their rifles.

I returned at once to my hole and, with many precautions, tore away the paper that covered it till I could look through.

My view was exceedingly restricted. To my immediate right, a foot perhaps from the hole, was the edge of a black coat. Beyond it I could see a small piece of table. It was just such a table as I had seen so often in government offices. By turning my head a little I could see the face of Clementin, almost directly opposite me. I was appalled by the ravages anxiety and lack of sleep had caused. It was the face of a haunted man, desperate and cornered. Yet I read in his eyes a spark of resolution, and as I watched, he shifted a little, pushing his head forward and staring intently at someone I could not see but only hear.

Mr. Algernon Woodstock was out of my line of vision to the left. He was still making his appeal. Then abruptly the vision was cut off, together with the voice of the Prime Minister. It was as though a curtain had fallen. It was not, however, a curtain, but the back of a coat worn by someone who was standing immediately on the other side of the hole and who had moved slightly.

"For God's sake shift, so that I can see."

I was saying this over and over again under my breath to the person who was blocking my view. At last he did so, turning a little, as though to hand something to Algernon Woodstock. The light fell momentarily upon his coat so that I could see its colour and texture. For a moment these conveyed nothing to me. Then I noticed an olive-green stripe running through the cloth and my heart bounded.

Within two feet of me was Colonel Granby.

There was no mistaking that cloth.

Without a moment's hesitation I pulled out the precious envelope, folded it lengthwise, pushed it through the hole, and prodded the obstructing coat. For a moment nothing happened. I prodded again. My

hand and wrist entirely obscured the hole, so that I could not see what I was doing. After what seemed an age, however, I felt the envelope gripped and pulled gently. I let go at once, withdrew my hand, and applied my eye to the spy-hole. I had just time to see the envelope quietly disappearing, held between a finger and a thumb, the nail of which was discoloured and black.

There came to my ears an even crackle of paper, and at the same moment I was aware of someone speaking in French.

I recognised the voice immediately. It was that of Vespasien Privet, and he appeared to be answering the observations of Mr. Algernon Woodstock.

He began by covering the British Prime Minister with every form of flattery. It was the customary prelude of the French orator to an attack in force. The British troops, Privet admitted, had indeed behaved with the utmost gallantry. It was a miracle of good fortune that they had been saved. Perhaps the resistance of the French Division under General Prioux and its magnificent rearguard action might have had something to do with it.

Here he was interrupted by Algernon Woodstock, who in a few grave words paid a tribute to the gallantry of Prioux and his men, which he took for a sign that the spirit of fighting France was still unshaken.

But, continued Privet, though the British Expeditionary Force had been saved, their arms and equipment had been lost, and it had just been stated that it would be months before they could return fully equipped to France. Was it possible, Privet asked, for the French Army to hold out? He must not be misunderstood if he maintained that this was doubtful. Highly doubtful. General Weygand did not think it possible, and when a general commanding a great army made such a statement as that, how was it possible for civilian

leaders to set it aside? There were, moreover, other factors to be considered. France had lost all her northern provinces with their industries, their coal, and the steel basin at Briey. She was in no position to continue the fight without immediate and prompt aid.

The British Prime Minister had seemed to suggest, Privet went on, that the German tanks were not irresistible. The fact remained, however, that wherever they were used in sufficiently large numbers, they had always succeeded in their object. They had always broken through, and, what was even more disastrous, they had spread panic among the civil population, with the result that men, women, and children, estimated as high as the enormous figure of ten million, a quarter of the population of France, were now streaming madly southwards, homeless, starving, and desperate. In those circumstances, was it advisable to carry on the struggle? Was it fair to the nation to carry it on? Was it right that further rivers of blood, not only military, but civilian blood, should be made to flow, frankly speaking, the chances of victory were so small?

On the word "victory," the voice of Algernon Woodstock was uplifted:

"Victory," he said, "is a question of faith and hope. Such a victory cannot be easily secured—and certainly not by the mechanised brute forces of the enemy. No victory, unsupported by the conviction and energy of the people, can ever be permanent. Monsieur Privet, and those of you who may have doubts concerning the ultimate defeat of the German invader, will recollect in their own history the fate which finally befell Napoleon, to whom victory came often and in swift and splendid shape. He and his glittering marshals brought it back to France from the plains of the Danube, from the snows of Poland, from the lush plenitude of the Palatinate, from the sun-warmed dust of Lombardy. But though

they brought it back, it did not remain with them, for it had no roots in the abiding spirit of man. It alighted finally upon the white cliffs of a small but resolute island in the grey mists of the north. And why? Because that island, and the men who lived upon it, faithfully refused to admit their defeat, but continued to show the tenacity and purpose which their great-grandchildren are now displaying in full and abundant measure. I tell you, gentlemen, there is no thought of defeat in England. From every home in our land comes the same resolution. It is not 'We will conquer or die.' It is something immeasurably greater than that. It is 'We will resist enslavement, every man, woman and child of us, till the end.' That is the spirit of England to-day, just as it was when we faced your great Napoleon. If he failed, can Hitler succeed?"

Another voice intervened—the voice of a Marshal of France.

"Would you then have us prolong this useless massacre? Is France to be utterly destroyed? Have you no feeling for the sufferings of our people?"

"The sufferings of your people are very present to all our minds," Woodstock continued, "and I have no doubt that my own people will be called upon to share them in full measure. But they will not be mitigated by submission, and I am convinced that, in France as in England, the people would rather die upon their feet than live upon their knees. Monsieur Clementin spoke for France when he said that she would resist to the end—if not in Paris, then on the Loire, or, if need be, in the French territories overseas. France has suffered a military reverse in the field, but she still has very great resources with which to continue the struggle—the second greatest navy in Europe, the second greatest Empire in the world, the admiration and sympathy of free men in every land. France has lost much, but she has still more to lose—men of unbroken spirit, a flag

which flies in the four quarters of the globe, immense fighting power beyond the seas, and, last but not least, gentlemen, an honour, still unblemished, which binds her, even though she may seek a military armistice under duress, to make no separate peace with our common foe."

"And if we ask you to release us from that obligation?" demanded Privet.

There was a short silence. The voice of Algernon Woodstock took an ever graver note as he answered:

"His Majesty's Government, in consideration of what France has suffered and of its present inability to render immediate and effective military support, is prepared to release a representative Government of France from its obligations in respect of an armistice such as Poland, Norway, Holland, and Belgium have been forced to accept. But that is a very different matter from a capitulation accepted by a government which consented, God forbid, to remain under enemy control. Such a capitulation would involve placing within the grasp of the enemy all the resources of France which still remain intact and beyond his reach. It would result not merely in the acceptance of a temporary reverse, but an active collaboration with the German military leaders in the destruction of Britain and her allies."

"We shall accept no terms inconsistent with the honour of France. If we seek an armistice, it will be an honourable agreement as between soldiers."

It was Marshal Villebois speaking. The answer came quickly.

"Marshal Villebois, you speak in good faith, but you deceive yourself if you think to secure an honourable agreement with Herr Hitler. That is a grievous illusion. If such an agreement had been possible in September last, there would have been no war. France can make no terms with Germany by submission. Germany will make full use of her present power. France will be

humiliated, despoiled, and compelled to serve the extreme purposes of the enemy."

Again there was a short silence. Then Clementine spoke.

"I will now ask you, my dear Prime Minister, to retire, so that we may take our decision—unless, that is, you have anything else to say."

"One last thing," responded Algernon Woodville. "I have said that England will fight on to the end—alone if necessary. But I still cannot conceive that we have come to such a pass. France and England understand one another. That is a simple phrase, but for our two peoples it is the simple truth. We in England no longer feel that a Frenchman is a Frenchman. We call him brother, and you, our brothers, are oppressed. You have sustained great blood, but you are not prone upon your backs, and, with our love and with our assisting hands, you shall rise to your feet again. Gentlemen, on behalf of His Majesty the Emperor, on behalf of the British Government, on behalf of the Governments of all the Dominions beyond the Seas, I offer you complete union with us. Not an alliance, not even a federation, but a perfect union. No longer shall there be British and French. There shall be one country. Not the United Kingdom, gentlemen, but a United Power. I offer you nothing. Let there be no frontiers between us. Let there be no barriers of trade or currency or custom. A French passport shall be as valid and potent in London as a British passport in France. The franc and the pound shall be one, a common currency to serve our common aims, our common hopes. There shall be one government, with your own Prime Minister at its head, under whom I should be proud to serve. The two great Empires shall confront the world, not as two, but as one, stretches from the shores of Northern Africa to the bays of Tasmania and the fog banks of Newfoundland.

That is my offer, gentlemen. I put it before you fully and freely. Hold fast for one month, for two months. If you cannot fight on the Seine, fight here on the Loire. If you cannot hold the Loire, hold the Mediterranean. Go to North Africa. Go, if need be, farther south, down to the heats of the Equator. But hold fast. The whole might of your declared brother is beside you. With that, whatever may be the tears and blood of the next few months—and I would not seek in any way to minimise them—a victory, sure, splendid and serene, is the certain consequence.

"Gentlemen, it is for you to choose. To me it is inconceivable that France should not continue the struggle by our side to the end. It is not possible that she should make this last retreat—not, as we have retreated in the past, for the moment outnumbered and overpowered, but the last retreat of all—a retreat from victory."

There was a lump in my throat, and my eyes were wet as I heard the voice of Clementin saying in broken tones:

"You have heard this offer, gentlemen, this magnificent and most generous offer. On behalf of you all, on behalf of France, I tender my most sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Prime Minister of Great Britain for having made it. I propose that we ask him now to withdraw on the understanding that we will communicate our decision regarding it within the next hour."

CHAPTER XXII

CABINET MEMORANDUM

I REMAINED in that empty room for an hour after Algernon Woodstock had withdrawn from the meeting, but I have neither the heart nor the pen to describe in detail what followed. My mind went back to the days when I had read at school that book in the history of Thucydides in which he describes the soldiers of Athens standing on the Plemmyrion overlooking the harbour of Syracuse, watching their Fleet as it made a desperate and unavailing attempt to break the Syracusan line. Listening at that hole in the wall to the debate which went this way and that on the other side, I felt like one of those Athenians, described by the Greek author, who "kept swaying their bodies to and fro in an agony of hope and fear as the stubborn conflict continued, for at every instant they were all but saved or all but lost."

In the end the vital vote was taken. They took it, not by a show of hands, but in writing, each member of the Cabinet setting down "yes" or "no" on a scrap of paper, and moving one by one to Clementin and dropping their vote into the open mouth of a ballot box.

The silence was absolute. I could see Clementin's hands trembling as he took from the box the scraps of paper on which the fate of France was written. Slowly he divided them into two heaps in front of him on the green cloth of the table. One pile grew larger than the other, and, when he had finished, I saw his hands rest a moment on the edge of the table. Then he spoke, and his voice was quite toneless:

"Eleven of us, myself included, have voted for the acceptance of the British Prime Minister's offer. There

are fourteen votes against. The offer is therefore rejected."

At the same moment I heard a rattling of the door-knob. I sprang away from the hole, moving towards the window. The door of the room swung open. Mr. Algernon Woodstock passed swiftly through, followed by Granby. In the background I caught a confused glimpse of officials and officers. Woodstock stepped quickly towards us.

"Thank you, Orford," he said. "Colonel Granby has told me what you have done."

I swallowed in my throat.

"I have just been listening, sir," I said. "They have rejected the offer by fourteen votes to eleven."

"So I have been informed," he responded. "Fourteen to eleven. . . . Eleven were brave. Colonel, we leave for England immediately. Now we fight alone."

I followed him from the room.

"Wait for me in Briard," said Granby in my ear as I passed. "I will join you in the Café Moderne in half an hour."

Outside the château I found Oliver Ackland in my motor-car. As we ran into Briard, he told me that he had brought Granby from Tours to the Cabinet meeting.

Granby himself joined us half an hour later at the Moderne. He related in a few brief sentences what had happened to him after he had set the lorry on fire with a shot in its petrol tank. He had been threatened with immediate arrest, but had been victorious in a fierce roadside argument. He had declared that the man driving the lorry was drunk and a danger to traffic. He had gone on to protest that he could not be held responsible for the collision, which (he had sworn) was the sole cause of the conflagration.

His eloquence, I gathered, had been considerable, and he had won over to his way of thinking the mass of the refugees within earshot. Finally he had accepted

a lift into Tours from an elderly Parisian dentist, escaping with his wife and family in a smart Hotchkiss. Once there, he had picked up Ackland, who had driven him straight to Briard.

"And now I return to London with the Prime Minister," he said, as the two waiters of the café made ready to close it with much clattering of shutters and shifting of iron chairs.

"What do you want *me* to do?" I said.

"Remain at your job, laddie. The French Cabinet may change its mind. Or it may not. In any case, the Prime Minister has need of a messenger. He has warned Clementin that the British Government cannot release France from her obligations under the alliance unless the French Fleet is put safely beyond reach of the enemy. He hopes that the French ships may be permitted to sail to British ports. But it is possible that the party of surrender, which seems to have carried the day, will accept an armistice which would require them to be brought into French ports where they would lie at the disposal of the Hun. It will be your job to wait here until the armistice terms are communicated to our Ambassador. You will then bring them personally to London.

"The terms may not be communicated," I objected.

"The Ambassador has instructions to secure them at all costs. So God bless, laddie. Now I must go."

Perhaps I should have ended this tale with the rejection of Mr. Algernon Woodstock's offer. But I have yet to complete the story of my mission—though it may seem like anticlimax. What followed was rendered passably dramatic by the intervention of a number of Junkers 88, but the die was cast at Briard and the rest is but a sequel.

I left Tours at ten o'clock on the following morning in one of the Embassy cars. Clementin, it appeared,

was still Prime Minister, but no one could say for how long. The French Government, like ourselves, was moving to Bordeaux. All that day we drove through vineyards, past old castles, warm homesteads, a great eleventh-century church with a magnificent west front, the name of which I have forgotten, till in the cool of the evening we reached our destination.

I have not the heart to describe in detail the next three days. They were very full. The French ministries were scattered all over the town, while the British Embassy was fifty kilometres away in the Château of Sauterne, amidst the vineyards which produce that sweet but famous wine. Ostensibly I was the slave of Henry Cheriton, who was here, there, and everywhere. Privet's ministry was housed in a vast new labour exchange, frescoed in the modern French manner with huge cartoons of the joys of labour in all its forms, but without any telephones or office equipment.

I kept constantly in touch with our Ambassador. He remained throughout imperturbable, smoking his cigarettes in a long holder, sustaining to the last his reputation for being the best-dressed diplomat in Europe, and meeting his staff at the only convenient rendezvous, the famous restaurant of the Chapon Fin. Here, amid its fantastic grottoes and mirrors, we talked and planned, but each scheme fell to pieces with the swiftness of a house of cards. My most vivid memory is of the crowds of English refugees who pressed into the poky offices of the Consulate, but for whom little could be done.

The final blow fell suddenly at the end of the third day. Up to that moment all kinds of possibilities had been under discussion. We could only conjecture what was happening, for our Ambassador, who hitherto had easy and familiar access to Clementin at all times, was now held at arm's length and knew nothing of what was passing behind the scenes. Once it was rumoured that we were to move to North Africa in the wake of the

French Government, where resistance was to be prolonged, and I passed again through all the agonies of hope and despair, such as I had suffered in the locked room at Briard. Some members of the Embassy even started for Perpignan. And yet, in my heart of hearts, I knew it was hopeless, and as I say, on the morning of the fourth day the blow fell. There was a brief announcement over the radio. Marshal Villebois had assumed the premiership and had asked the Germans, as a soldier who would parley in honourable fashion, God save the mark, to stop fighting.

On that day, June 17th, when the French delegates, General Huntziger and Monsieur Noel, were on their way to Compiègne to suffer the indignity of hearing Hitler's terms in the same railway carriage as had been occupied by Marshal Foch when he dictated the Armistice of 1918, I bade farewell to my journalist friends, French and British.

In a small café near the Hôtel Splendide, Cheriton and I sat side by side making out passes for all those of the fraternity who wished to go to England. One by one they left, controlled, humorous and resolute to the last. Many of them had lived in France for twenty years and loved her with a love passing the love of woman. Now, in the hour of her desperate need, she had rejected them, and off they went in their cars to le Verdon, where the old liner *Madura* was waiting to take them to England.

When the last of them had gone, I turned my attention to their French colleagues, on most of whose heads a price had been set. I conducted Madame Tabouis and Pertinax, Buré of the *Œuvre* and Elie Bois of the *Petit Parisien*, to a British destroyer lying by the quay-side, and saw them transferred to another ship. Their faces wore a look of tragic resignation which defies my powers of description.

That night, I remember, there was an air raid and

bombs fell on the quay-side, destroying my motor-car, among other objects of greater military value.

The next three days passed depressingly enough in a great coming and going. Henry Cheriton, as a close friend of the Ambassador, was constantly with him. What they talked about and what they tried to do are not germane to their record. We could get no inkling of what the Bordeaux Government intended to do with the French ships and we had no means of communicating with London.

But London was vitally concerned, and at the eleventh hour the First Lord of the Admiralty came to Bordeaux with a renewal of Algernon Woodstock's proposals. He came by air, he and his staff, in two Sunderland flying-boats, only to return in a few hours empty-handed.

I was not present at his meeting with Villebois, but it required little imagination on my part to picture the scene. I could see the old Marshal, maintaining an outward appearance of immense and meaningless dignity, talking endlessly in the same strain as that in which he had already spoken over the French wireless. France was defeated. She had preferred ease and luxurious living to manly labour and child-bearing.

On the morning of the third day I received a summons from the Ambassador. He handed me a sealed envelope.

"Orford," he said, "I want you to take this to the Prime Minister as fast as you can. One of the flying-boats which came here with the First Lord remained behind with engine trouble, but she will be ready to take off in half an hour."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"In that envelope," continued the Ambassador, "are the armistice terms which were signed yesterday by the French plenipotentiaries."

I suppose my face registered astonishment.

"You wonder how I got them," he said. "I tried

Baudouin yesterday, the new Foreign Minister. He was extremely polite, but he had only one copy. So I went to the President of the French Republic. He, too, was polite and began to put me off. He was tapping his paper on the desk in front of him. The more I urged the necessity and fairness of being favoured with a copy of the terms, the more apologetic he became. I have seldom seen an honest man in such a pickle. Presently he lifted his hands. I bent over the table and swept up the paper. 'Thank you, Monsieur le President,' I said. 'This is most kind of you,' and left the room."

I put the envelope in my pocket. The Ambassador held a book in his hands. He looked up at me.

"*How many decrepit, hoary, harsh, writhen, bursten-bellied, crooked, toothless, bald, blear-eyed, impotent, rotten, old men shall you see flickering still in every place,*" he read slowly. Burton, my dear Orford, is sometimes strangely to the point, don't you think?"

This was the first description I ever heard of those who are now known as the men of Vichy, but I still think it to be the best.

I boarded the flying-boat at dawn and we took off as the sun came up. I had never been in anything like so large a machine before. These Sunderlands were, I believe, originally designed to fly the Atlantic in time of peace. Now they serve, as you know, as our chief long-distance air reconnaissance machines over the sea.

I spent some time wandering about the ship. In the nose of the upper deck was the bombing expert, in a Fraser-Nash gun-turret. Behind him was the control cabin, with the two pilots sitting side by side, and behind them the radio operator, navigator and engineer. The navigator, an earnest young man, was busy for the first part of our flight with protractors over the charts, but more, I think, by way of practice than for necessity. I moved along the lower deck, through the wardroom

on the starboard side to the galley aft. I was particularly interested in the armament of the ship. On either side of the body were two Vickers machine-guns on pillar mountings, manned by two members of the crew, and right in the stern was a rotating gun-turret beneath the rudder, with four machine-guns.

I found plenty of room to walk between the walls of the great fuselage, braced at regular intervals with aluminium struts. The cross section reminded me of nothing so much as an inverted egg or pear. I watched the cook in his galley preparing breakfast for the crew, and wished that Dr. Goebbels could see him. It would have done him good to see the lashings of eggs and bacon prepared over the electric stove, and kept warm, for the crew could not all eat at the same time, in three electric ovens.

We were making for Falmouth and were perhaps three-quarters of an hour out, when suddenly I heard a shout:

"Action stations. Standby."

The crew, who were now at breakfast, leaped to their feet. A moment later they were at their gun stations, while the ship took on a perilous slant which flung me to the floor between the two machine-gunners amidships.

"Better stay there," said one of them, "and keep out of the way."

Through a porthole I saw, against the risen sun, first three, then four, then five, and finally six aircraft, sweeping down upon us, so that the noise of their engines drowned that of our own.

"JU. 88's," said one of our gunners.

Our dive continued. For a moment I thought we had been hit. Then suddenly the dive ceased and I saw we were a hundred feet, if that, above the water, so low that I thought we were going into it. Then the machine-gun to port opened with a loud stutter. At the same moment I became aware of what seemed like a swarm

of bees about my ears. I saw the machine-gunner stop for a moment and put a hand to his shoulder. Then he continued firing. At the same moment an infernal din burst from the air, and I saw a JU. 88, its black cross distinct on the wings, dive abruptly and strike the sea in a gleam of foam.

"Well done," I shouted, for I was by this time mad with excitement, only to receive the foot of one of the gunners between my shoulder-blades. I thought at first that he was holding me down under the impression that I was going to run round the ship in panic, but I discovered that he was wholly intent upon handing a belt of ammunition to his colleague on the starboard side.

He removed his boot from my shoulder-blades. Whereupon I stumbled forward and climbed to the upper deck.

I had just reached it when I received what I thought was a squirt of water in the eye. But the smell gave it away. One of the tanks had been hit and the petrol was pouring over me in a thin spray. Then came a noise so loud that I said to myself, "We're blowing up."

But it was one of the Junkers. It disintegrated in mid-air a hundred yards away on our port beam, for the gunners had held their fire until they could see the eyes of the German pilots. A fragment of the Junker, a piece of the tail plane, I think, sailed past us and hit the hull with a crack. At the same time I saw the pilot in front of me flinch and fall forward, as an orange flash burst like a rose in full bloom above his head. Our craft staggered, but the man at the controls lifted his head. There was blood streaming down his face.

The flying-boat gave a sweep upwards. I felt a moment of sickening nausea.

Then all was calm and serene again.

A man pushed past. He was making for the tank which had sprayed me. There was a lump of cotton waste in his hand.

"Not an uneventful trip," said the navigator with a smile when we landed two hours later at Falmouth.

I was met in London by a Government car, and it was exactly four-forty-five when I turned the corner into Downing Street. There was a crowd of perhaps a couple of hundred persons standing outside the Foreign Office, gazing at the door of No. 10. A grave butler stood on the threshold. He did not ask my business. Clearly he had been told to expect me.

"If you will be good enough to step this way," he said.

I found myself in the long Cabinet room with the pillars and the famous window overlooking the garden. Algernon Woodstock was at one end of the Cabinet table, a red despatch box in front of him. He was alone.

"From the Ambassador in Bordeaux, sir," I said.

Without a word he took the envelope, broke it open, pulled out the sheets, and started to read.

Suddenly he looked up.

"The French Fleet," he said, "is to be brought back to French ports and there, if Hitler keeps his word with a defenceless country, they will remain till the end of the war. *If Hitler keeps his word——*"

He broke off and read the last sheet. He laid it down on the table.

"But we know what Hitler will do, Mr. Orford," he continued, "and I know, too, what we must do."

He touched a bell in front of him. A secretary entered the room.

"Ask the First Lord to come here immediately," said Mr. Algernon Woodstock, "and send me a stenographer."

A middle-aged woman with a note-book sidled into the room.

"Cabinet memorandum," said the Prime Minister.

"Heading please," said the secretary severely.

"Directions concerning units of the French Fleet likely to come under enemy control," he responded meekly.

Then he began to dictate:

"French Naval Commanders at Oran and Alexandria should be invited to choose between the following proposals. First, that the ships under their command should proceed to a British or Allied port with a view to continuing in service against the common enemies of France and Britain. Second, that the ships should proceed to a French port in the West Indies, there to be demilitarised beyond control of the enemy. Officers negotiating with the French commanders should be careful to point out that this procedure would be in conformity with the expressed intention of the Franco-German armistice which is to secure that the vessels in question shall remain quiescent till the end of the war. Third, that the ships should be rendered useless for further naval operations.

"Stop. Paragraph.

"It should be made quite clear to the French Naval Commanders that if, under instructions received from the Cabinet of Marshal Villebois, they are unable to accept one or other of these proposals, the sole intention of which is to prevent their ships being used in warfare against a country which still regards itself as the ally of France and which holds itself pledged to restore the independence and greatness of France, the British Navy will have no choice but to prevent these ships from reaching any port or harbour within effective reach of the German High Command.

"Stop. Paragraph."

The door opened and the First Lord of the Admiralty came to the table.

Algernon Woodstock, turning to greet him, noticed that I was still present.

"Thank you, Mr. Orford," he said. "You may

